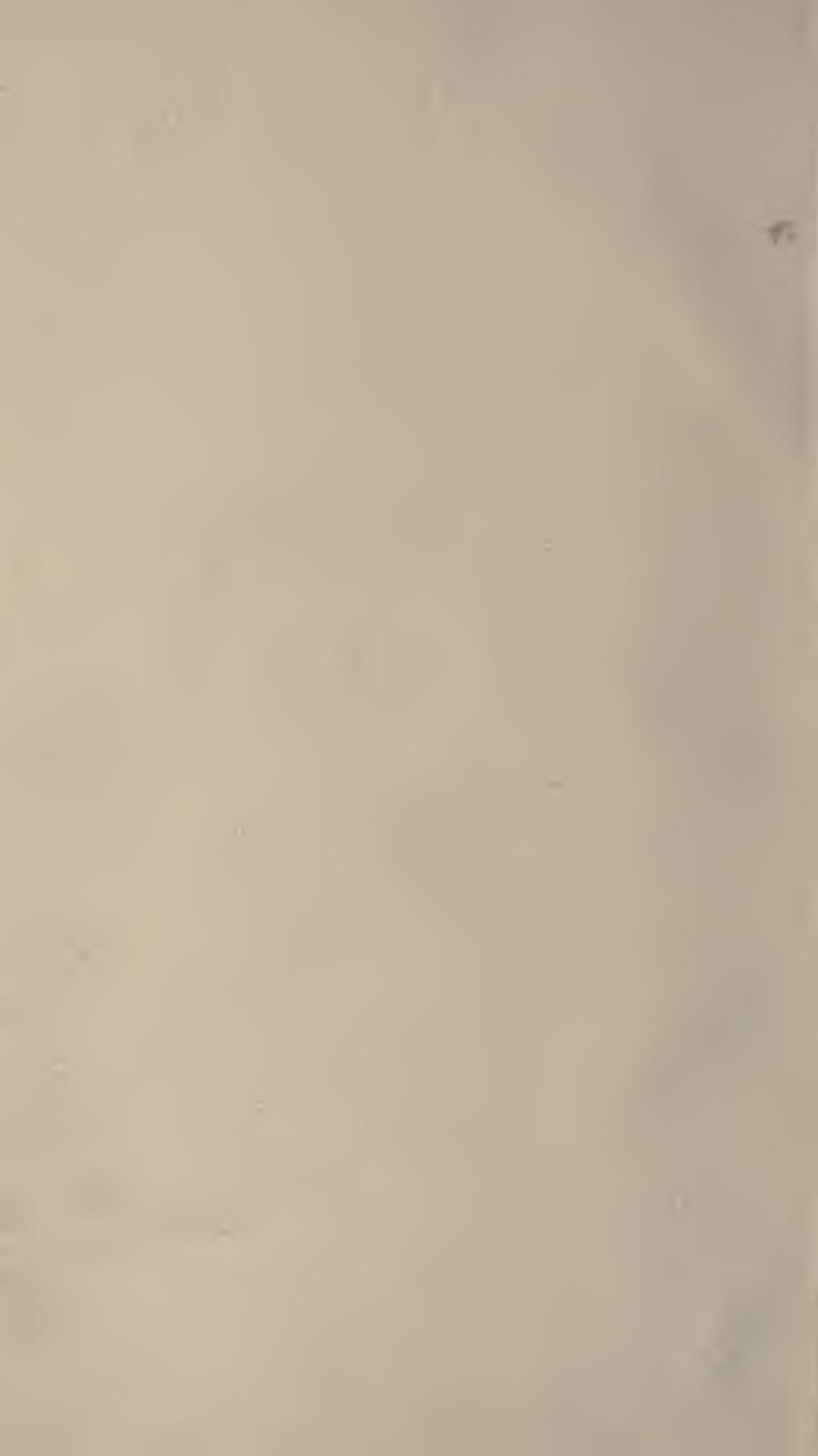


The Puppet



THE PUPPET

BY
CLINTON ROSS



NEW YORK
STONE & KIMBALL

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To Thomas Bailey Aldrich

My Dear Mr. Aldrich:

In September, 1888, if you may remember, I had the good fortune to cross the North Atlantic with you, and the chance to learn that the poet's personality may be of finer quality even than the fine verse which already made me feel I knew you well. The charm of certain talk lingers; and, although I have not seen you since, the verses are always mine at least. They, and the personal memory, lead me to propitiate Fortune by putting on the title-page of this romance your name.



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Prefatory Note

Count Carlo Gozzi, the Venetian, says ingenuously that “humanity has always quested after the marvelous like a hound,” which may be true enough; and yet, he who has an extraordinary tale to tell must hesitate. But there are considerations other than my own which lead to this narration; and on their account I am willing to risk people decrying it. For I have felt, and Monseigneur Réux has felt (I call him still “monseigneur”), that this should be told, not only to explain certain episodes for the students of contemporary manners and politics, but as well to give the true reasons for the seemingly inexplicable conduct of a family whose affairs, from their circumstances, are public mat-

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ters. Events have made that family dear to me. I feel that I, who know these things as well as any living man, should tell the story. If I have told it ill, I am not by profession a literary man. If the events present themselves with a surprising suddenness that takes away their credibility, they are told as my memory carries them — beginning with the adventure — the extraordinary episode that befell in the most matter-of-fact of the modern world's great towns. But there is nothing so surprising as the truth, — as we all find, sooner or later.

R. G.

At Mentone, 27th Nov., 1895.

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Chapter I

How the Bishop of Westchester Remarked on the Ease of Pass- ing from the Ordinary to the Extraordinary

“IT’S so easy to cross the line from the ordinary to the extraordinary,” said the Bishop, sententiously, aside to me that evening.

“Some lines are easy to cross,” I answered, watching Mrs. Harrington; and then remembering I was talking to the Bishop; “for instance, the line from respectability to disrespectability.”

“Now, who would have supposed a German peddler’s grand—”

“He peddled well,” said I, for I am ashamed to say that my thoughts were more across the room than with the Bishop of Westchester.

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“Ah, that’s good, Mr. Gerald; almost as good as Mrs. Pemberton’s port,” said the Bishop. “Now that reminds me that the Duke’s people were once —”

“Ah, yes —” said I; “now it’s extraordinary how people gossip.”

“Gossip,” said the Bishop, “is an invention of the devil.”

“The patent must pay well.”

“Now, really, Mr. Gerald,” began the Bishop.

“Bob!” said my cousin, the hostess, calling to me, “how can you?”

“How can I what, Sally?” said I.

“You know you are not witty,” said my cousin. “The Bishop laughs only because you are rich —”

“It’s not my fault,” said I.

“Your poor wit?” said my cousin.

“That my father, who began as nobody, was clever enough to outdo Mr. Gould in being somebody. It was my father’s fault that I am —”

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“ You are not a bit like your father,” said cousin Sally.

“ He married a Maryland Pemberton,” said I; “ so I happen to be your cousin.”

“ Your poor, dear father was a remarkable man —”

“ Yes, I know, Sally,” said I; “ Robert Gerald, First, was the most remarkable man —”

“ Then you must know, Bob,” said my cousin, “ that the Bishop laughs at your jokes because you are your father’s son —”

“ Because I shine in my father’s glory. But I thought bishops —”

“ Exactly,” said my cousin. “ People are so horribly insincere.”

At this moment my cousin proved they could be; but the “insincerity of good manners is often the sincerity of kindness.”

A lady had entered. My cousin failed to catch the name, but evidently thought she knew the face.

“ My dear Mrs. Pennington,” she cried,

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rushing forward in her most affable manner, "how delighted I am after all these years — how delighted! And how is Louise — ?"

"I am Louise!" said the lady stiffly. My poor, dear cousin was taken back for a moment. To have mistaken a daughter for a mother was sufficiently embarrassing. I left the beautiful Mrs. Harrington to twit my cousin by way of conversational revenge. The opportunity was too good an one.

"Speaking of the insincerity of bishops!" said I. "Now weren't you rather — ?"

"How should I know after not seeing her in twenty-one years?" began my cousin. "But how can you flirt with that horrid — ?"

"The Harrington?" said I. "Now she's very pretty — ?"

"It's your money, Bob."

"Oh, bother my money," said I, and for a moment I did not feel at all grateful

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to my father for leaving me the richest bachelor of the town. I decided I would go out to the ranch in Wyoming ; I fully intended to.

Outside, Larkins had not appeared with the hansom, and I strolled up the avenue. Belated persons passed. The spire of Saint Patrick's was lost in a misty blackness. The lights twinkled the length of the long street. I paused for a moment beyond the still brilliant square, hesitating whether I should go into the white, new club, that, if the marble were only a bit discolored, might stand on Pall Mall. Across the street was the dim — at the hour and place — forest-like mystery of the park. Beyond stretched the long street, with scattered lights, and behind lay the square, with the far reach of open along the avenue below.

The square as it stands today seems to be a line of demarcation between the old New York — the gone provincial ideals it typified — and the newer, more intricate

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capital of the West whose palaces will stretch in a score of years more along the Riverside drive on one of the boulevards of the world. For the commercial capital of the West is ceasing to be merely imitative ; its people have become self-conscious, with no longer the fear of being non-national in acquiring what is best across the seas. A cosmopolitanism hovers about the great city ; and this particular square already seems to promise to be what the Bowling Green was once ; Washington and Union Squares successively ; and what Madison Square now is. But the next few years will see the immediate center of a population of nearly five millions of people. The modern commercial capital will not have, like the old Venice, a shining, glorious center, reflecting its light ; but, like London, there will be squares and squares, and centers of portions. To make a comparison, the square at Fifty-ninth street and Central Park will be as Hyde Park corner.

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I paused with these reflections, not unusual with my townsmen, that night after leaving my cousin's, Mrs. Pemberton's reception. The street was deserted, excepting for a cab and an-occasional policeman. The October air had a chill, and I pressed my coat closer, with a feeling of despair at the general futility of my life. Robert Gerald, First, had left me, Robert Gerald, Second, power and station. He who, in his busy career, could not imagine that sensation, did not know that he had added the poison of ennui. For I had my father's strong vitality with nothing except sports and society and some tiresome vices on which to spend it. I wonder how many others there are as I was a year ago; for a fortune possessed by a person whose ancestry has not given him the aptitude for it is a most common phenomenon in the United States. But I will hasten to say that my sister and I are of the Maryland Pembertons. My father came from the people; did not know who

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his grandfather was ; but he himself married a descendant of the Revolutionary hero, the redoubtable — a lady who could trace her family to Duke William.

In telling this unusual story of what happened to me last year, and how I became involved in those matters which once indeed threatened an European complication, I really can see nothing more extraordinary than my own father's progress from extreme poverty to wealth, with all its modern potentiality. His life is only part of that of the financial adventurers who, since the Rebellion, have developed the resources of the United States, gaining the prestige of power.

No, this story of my own experiences is no more remarkable than my father's career ; and so, I will hesitate no longer, fearing the criticism of those who may accuse me of stealing the privilege of the romancer.

Adjoining my town house, which my father built at considerable expense (and

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which I now occupied alone since my sister's marriage in Great Britain), is a large house of the Chicago wheat speculator, Perkins. In 1893 Caleb Perkins was "crippled," as they say, financially, and being unable to find a purchaser for so expensive an house, he had rented it to several successive tenants. Only two weeks before my man Larkins had told me the place had been leased again to some foreigners — Italians, he thought. "You never see 'em, sir," he went on to explain. "The servants can't be made to talk — and —"

"Confound your curiosity, Larkins!" I had said then; and had thought no more about it.

But as I paused at my own door, I looked for some reason at this monument of Perkins' extravagance when wheat had been his way. I am not very curious, but to-night I regretted I had interrupted Larkins' story — whatever it might have been. The great place was

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dark, irresponsive. Suddenly from the shadow of the vestibule came a woman. On the street she looked up and down as if uncertainly ; and then she saw me. Hesitating for a moment, she came toward me, where I stood by my own door.

“ Monsieur,” said she, and her French was in an exquisitely modulated voice that seemed to convey a sense of a different personality from that which I had vaguely expected in my hesitancy at the door.

“ Yes,” said I, in English.

She shook her head. She stood before me piquantly charming. I could swear already this was the most extraordinary experience in my life, and I had been about the world — from San Francisco to Calcutta — seeking to destroy ennui.

“ I do not speak English, Monsieur. I am running — from enemies.”

She motioned to the house she had left. At the moment was a rattling at that door.

“ Let me in, Monsieur, I pray you. I cannot escape them if you do not.”

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Impulsively I opened my door and admitted her. It was most extraordinary of me, I know now; and I believe I felt it then.

“Close the door,” said the lady, breathlessly. For lady she certainly was. I knew enough of the world not to be mistaken on that point.

I closed the door. She threw back the cloak from her head — standing there tall, noble, with sparkling black eyes, and that exquisite hair the Venetians dreamed. I knew her face. The plain black gown was without ornament, save for a single ruby at her throat. The hands were bare, long and slender, with one curiously carved ring on the third finger of the left hand.

“I have seen you, Mademoiselle,” I began; but at first I could not tell where; I was sure she was not “Madame.”

“Yes, possibly,” she began.

At the moment was a ringing at the door.

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“ Hide me somewhere,” she began. “ I am at your mercy, Monsieur.”

Obeying, I pushed her into the dark room at the left.

“ Thank you,” said the lady ; for lady — even great lady — as I have said, I felt she was. At the moment Larkins appeared at the end of the hall ; but he had not seen her, I was sure.

I opened the outside door myself. A little, dark fellow stood there. I saw he was strangely excited.

“ I am sorry to trouble you, sir,” he began with an accent that was from one of the Roman tongues. “ Did you see a lady—? ”

“ A lady—? ” I began.

“ A mad lady has escaped from the house next door — and disappeared.”

I should have told him differently I know, by all laws of reason ; but there was that in her entreaty, were she sane or insane, which made me act unreasonably.

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“Really,” said I, “I have seen no one. Did you, Larkins?”

I was sure he had n’t.

“No, sir.”

“It’s very strange—” began the man at the door.

“Why?”

“She must have gone into some house in the neighborhood.”

“Who was she?”

“A mad woman—a foreigner—whom we were detaining until we could arrange to take her back to—”

“To?”

“Europe.”

“Ah!” said I, “but Europe is large.”

“It does not matter where,” said the man. “It’s important—”

“Is she dangerous?” said I.

“No, not dangerous, but she must be found.”

“What is the name?”

“Cabanel,” he answered; but I knew he was improvising.

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“Spanish?”

“I did not say that, sir. But are you sure?”

“I have said so,” said I, stiffly. He looked me over from head to toe with little, suspicion-bearing eyes. I closed the door in his face, wondering at myself.

“Sir —” began Larkins.

“You may go.”

“But, sir —”

I saw he had something to say.

“You may go,” I said again.

As he turned the lady appeared in the doorway.

“Thank you, Monsieur,” said she. “You never will regret this,” as if she were a princess who could confer favors.

“I am sure I never shall,” said I, remembering all at once, as one will after futile efforts, where I had seen her. And it was the recollection which left the matter all the stranger; and which made me question whether after all the man at the door had not lied about the lady’s

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sanity. Whatever the situation, I plainly was meddling, and making myself a deal of trouble.

And then I remembered the Bishop of Westchester's sententious remark earlier that evening: "It's so easy to cross the line from the ordinary to the extraordinary," a remark from which, when spoken, I had differed, as indeed, who would n't — with the noise of New York, the modern, commercial clatter in his ears.

Chapter II

Being a Confession of Susceptibility

WILL any feature of the new New York of which I was philosophizing ever become so entirely satisfying, to all sorts and conditions of men, as the Venetian Piazza? I have seen persons from the far West who dropped g's as nonchalantly as a poseur his cleverness, and who twanged our mother English, who have felt the Piazza; but taste is not limited by grammar, as hopeless pedants would have us believe; nor by Ruskin.

I was, in my memory, on the Piazza San Marco of the May twilight, looking at that delicious coloring which entered into the souls of the old Venetians, as you know from the galleries. The crowd surged by, dandies, flippant young officers,

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rounders who had come and gone there all their long, useless lives, black-eyed women, with the little shrug of the shoulders, the innate coquetry of the city of the marriage, sea and land. My coffee did not keep my musings still; and suddenly they were taken up by a low, musical voice over my shoulder, in that softest of tongues, which always will give, to my ear, the Italian opera an advantage over the German. But as I have said, *de gustibus* — which is to say, every man to his own taste of a woman, religion, politics, a picture, a play, a book, or music, which is near sentiment.

Three people were there at the little table, around which Florian's oldest waiter bustled obsequiously — a striking, black-eyed, black-haired gentlemen; an old white-haired woman, and a younger lady, who was plainly owner of the well-toned voice. She might have been twenty, or twenty-five, or thirty. I saw only a certain distinction of breeding, and manner, and, for details, that the face was thin,

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noble, with delicious dark eyes, a broad, low forehead framed by that exquisitely colored hair. I looked twice, thrice. Decidedly the lady looked much out of the ordinary — but Italians, probably.

I ever am given to vivid impressions of faces; so much so that when I see the same face again I often am on the point of bowing, and carrying that recognition to acquaintance. The lady's face I put away carefully in my memory, as a bit of symphony in the setting. I should have liked it better had I seen her of the early morning, when the Piazza is swept of the night, out of the spaces of the Adriatic, into a quietness; for I fancied she was the sort of woman who would add to the distinction of even that spot in its most distinguished moment, when the early morning has it to itself.

I will make no particular defence of this point of view of the stranger I saw that evening at Florian's; nor at thirty-five do I think I had much sentimentality left,

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although it's a proverb that a man who has been through many experiences is the weakest.

That evening on the Piazza San Marco, which occurred to me, is far away; for there has been so much in my life since, that even a year made those days a dream, or a recollection of a far gone experience which takes in the mind the place of dream. And she I saw that evening became like a picture in a Venetian gallery — that I put away when I was again in London where I know many people, and where I was in the little dark-browned house that stands at an alley's blind end, off from Piccadilly, with the sign "The Earl of Duesdale."

Duesdale and I have many discussions. "You commercial Americans —" he began one day.

"My father, who was a poor Irishman, did exactly as your ancestor —"

"Founded a family? I do n't suppose the first robber Dalton was better."

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“Thanks,” said I. “At least you English appreciate the same thing.”

“Well, I was thinking you might introduce me, say at Newport. You know I must marry some money.”

“And our new rich do n’t carry their pasts over here.”

“Bother your pasts; they make no difference if you may be agreeable.”

“Humph,” said I; “we have some good blood. My father may have been a poor Irish adventurer; but my mother was of the Revolutionary Pembertons, as good blood, say —”

“As the Daltons,” said their present head cynically.

“Well, yes, now that you mention it”

“You Americans are so funny when you get on this subject of family —”

“I acknowledge that my father had none —”

“He was an ancestor.”

“Oh, he was forcible.”

I remembered in time there was a

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scandal about Robert Gerald's First's sense of *meum* and *tuum* in certain railroad transactions; but then that is not altogether uncommon in a founder of an American family. Those ancient gentlemen who were our English cousins' progenitors sometimes appropriated others' possessions as nonchalantly. The only justification in either case is strength to maintain one's self in the position taken. I am proud of my father, who, from a poor, ancestorless — that is to say, he did n't know 'em — Irish immigrant, became one of the first of American financiers; nor did I have any patience with my sister when she tried to assume the arms of the real Geralds. "Nobody knows our grandfather. They can't contradict our claim," said my dear sister.

"Bosh!" said I, "was not our father enough? Is it not greater to be a great man's child than his hundredth descendant?"

Now despite the world I believe it is.

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And I think my sister did quite enough (or more than enough) when she married the sixth Baron Shaugnessy. My father was born a nobody on the Shaugnessy estate. He died that somebody who controlled the markets of the world; and his daughter married the heir of his own mother's landlord. And it is this that makes me prouder of being Robert Gerald's son than a descendant of the Maryland Pembertons — although Americans are rather proud of long descent. In fact, I have often said we are a race of snobs, and need our Thackeray, or our Juvenal. He doubtless will appear, as demand creates the supply in this matter of satire as in that of trade. He really will do us a deal of good, serving us a mental tonic.

It is out of respect for my father that I feel compelled to return to America occasionally to look after the affairs he made, although I am conscious of poor enough financial perception. He knew I was im-

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practical, and was rather proud of it, for, like most men, he appreciated that side of character he himself lacked. He has been maligned ; but if he rode rough-shod over other people's interests, that was the way in his day — the day of Mr. Fisk and Mr. Gould ; and nature seems to have created this style of man to develop a new country, just as she made a Roman or Norman conqueror's sheer, relentless force. And this is that I find to be proud of in the memory of my father ; and those who know him will pardon me, his son, for adding my evidence that I feel he was a great, a remarkable man.

That night with Duesdale was before my departure to America. We decided, all other things failing, to go to a sentimental rendering of David Garrick by Mr. Wyndham. In one of the boxes I saw the face I had noticed at Florian's. She seemed to be with three others, whom I failed to place, although the persons in the stalls about appeared to recognize personages.

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“Is n’t that a face to remember,” I said to Duesdale. “I saw her two months ago on the Piazza San Marco. Who is she?”

“The young lady, you mean?”

“Of course.”

“Jove, I do n’t know. The others — one is a German princess, the Grand Duchess of Heidelberg, related to our royalty.”

“Yes, but she?” I asked again.

“I should know — a woman like that; but I do n’t. She looks a foreigner. But you can’t tell.”

You indeed never can; and I was forced to leave London without knowing. But the impression that face made on me was indelible; and I carried it with me on to the rough sea beyond Southampton. Nor did I suspect what the remembrance was to mean; and how it was to involve me in those circumstances which I hesitate to recount, because they seem so improbable, but which have much to do with

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an explanation of certain events that already have become more or less part of contemporary European history. Who can tell of his morrow?

For I was willing to swear the lady — who was declared an escaped lunatic — was no other than she I saw first that evening at Florian's while the Venetian crowd surged by, and the band played, and San Marco faced the scene with its superb color blending with the twinkling blue. I made the matter plain by asking her.

Chapter III

How I Lodge My Visitor, and Wonder at Myself.

“IN Venice.”

“Yes, Venice,” said she, there in the hall of the house in the most garish of the most modern world’s capitals.

“At Florian’s.”

“Ah, I remember, two years ago—in May.”

“Yes.”

“And—”

“And—?”

“Stop,” said the lady, when I remembered we still were standing in the hall.

“If you will come in,” said I, entering the room, and turning on the gas. “I am sure you are not mad. But this is very peculiar.”

“Monsieur, I am not.”

How I Lodge My Visitor

“ But what does this mean ? ”

“ I cannot tell you ; I wish — ”

“ But what farther do you wish me to do ? ” I asked, trying to summon common-sense against her attractiveness.

“ You have done me a great favor. If tomorrow you can take or send a letter to the Italian consul ? ”

“ I will, gladly.”

“ But you wish to know more about me, and I — I feel I cannot tell you, under the circumstances.”

“ I am curious, I ’ll confess.”

“ But if you wish — you run danger, Monsieur.” Yet she had said I should not regret this episode.

I laughed. I did not know what danger was, in light of modern law and order; and was I not powerful ?

“ I do n’t care — but where can I take you ? ”

“ Ah, I know no one here.”

“ You know no one in New York ? ”

“ Positively, no one.”

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“ But — ? ”

“ If you only could find me a place to stay until tomorrow, when you can communicate with the Italian consul.”

“ You are an Italian ? ”

“ No,” said she, “ not altogether.”

I began to be even more perplexed than at the first. Was she simply a mad-woman ? How was it all to be explained ? And yet there was that about her personality leaving all explanations of no particular account. I could be sure she was some person out of the ordinary ; for there was a certain distinction — that indefinable something which was breeding, and looking at her standing there in my house I was equally sure the madness was but a phrase. We are all mad, more or less. I could not be wrong in that, I suppose ; indeed, my reasons were founded on folly. A woman with such hair, so exquisite a face, may leave one foolish.

“ There are reasons, I see, why you should not wish to tell me about yourself.”

How I Lodge My Visitor

“Good ones, Monsieur.”

“And equally good why you should be hidden.”

“You understand, Monsieur.”

“But tomorrow?”

“I may be able to communicate with my friends.”

“And no one must know you are here?”

“It’s safer.”

“I think I can arrange it, Mademoiselle. For, fortunately, this is my house; I am alone; and I think my servants can be induced — to be discreet.”

I went into the hall, summoning Larkins. If she were mad I had fallen to humoring her madness.

“The lady next door!”

“Yes, sir,” said he, his eyes bulging.

“She is here.”

“Here, sir?” He started as if I had told him I had a ghost hidden.

“But she is not mad. She is bothered by enemies. I choose to help her.”

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He probably thought I had been drinking — although I rarely did too much — or that this was a chapter out of a novel, a surprising sequence of the improbable in the possible.

“ You are to know nothing about it.”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ If you do, you lose your place.”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ If you do not, you have your wages increased.”

“ I do n’t understand.”

“ It’s just — silence.”

“ I understand.” But I doubted.

“ Send Mrs. Pierce.”

Mrs. Pierce is the housekeeper, and with her, good New England woman that she was, I anticipated rather more trouble. But I explained I had a friend who needed chaperoning ; that she must for certain reasons remain there in the house ; that she could speak no English.

“ A lady you met in furrin’ parts ? ”

How I Lodge My Visitor

“Exactly,” said I, renewing my explanation. And then I proceeded further, treating the case imaginatively, until Mrs. Pierce was won, or appeared to be so, when I returned to the room where my strange protégé was waiting. I told her, while Mrs. Pierce regarded her at first inimically, that this was my house-keeper, that I had arranged her lodging.

“Thank you, much,” said she, giving Mrs. Pierce a smile. “I hope, Monsieur, you may not suffer from your kindness,” she added again strangely. How could I indeed?

“I am glad to be of any service,” said I; and yet, wondering at myself.

She extended a cold, soft little hand, and was gone with the housekeeper, leaving the room strangely desert, and I by myself questioning why I had done as I had. But who could expect such an occurrence in this ordinary town? Who could say how he would act under similar

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circumstances? I went up to my room, but not to sleep.

For it is not without a shock that one suddenly finds routine broken by the unexpected.

Chapter IV

How I am Convinced There May Be Real Occurrences Stranger Than Fiction

BUT it's the morning that corrects your follies; the morning when you wonder at yourself. I awoke saying, "Fool"; a definition of myself—making conceit hurt its owner—I carried down to my coffee. I thought I must have dreamed these occurrences, as they were of "the stuff that" make castles in Spain—the realm of pure folly. I deliberately had harbored a madwoman, against all common-sense. Outside it was grey fog calling on common-sense to revenge itself. I wondered—

Just then Mrs. Pierce brought my guest. She was pale, and yet bore that simple distinction that made all other rea-

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sons for her conduct impossible than that she had been forced to this false appearance. She was the lady I had seen on the Piazza, again at the play in London with a lady of the regime — the phlegmatic blood royal of the Hanoverian brood. Yes, here she was in my house, where she had been followed by a strange, foreign person who had declared her mad. And I had harbored her. It's curious how your common-sense can leave you under certain provocation. But all at once, despite myself, I became as foolish, I think, as the night before.

“I have written the Italian consul,” said she, “I hope I may be able to requite your hospitality — your aid, Monsieur; and — some day — I may be able to explain.”

Now curiosity is against manners; and there was that something of the “great lady,” of being, as the phrase is, “to the manor born,” that halted my boorishness.

Stranger than Fiction

“I am glad, I am sure, should I have been of any possible service.”

She was my *vis-a-vis*. The situation was singularly delightful; over coffee and rolls. Now and then she blushed prettily, although we said little.

“What a great, ugly place your New York is?”

“Ah, you do n’t know it.”

“I was on my way here when I fell into a plot that had been laid for me.”

“I am sure I shall hold myself most lucky if I may help you to thwart it.”

“I owe you much.”

“Nothing — any one would have done so much.”

“But I count myself fortunate,” said she.

“And I, too — to have had the privilege.”

Now she accepted this kind of talk as natural, and I wondered a bit — as if she fancied herself a princess, or really were one. I remembered the box at Mr.

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Wyndham's Garrick. Was she, indeed? Great position and possession are common delusions of madness. But, as I say, I hesitated to ask; and yet when I was outside I wondered at myself. She declared the Italian consul would arrange it all, and that there I should have my explanation. I had the letter, addressed in a pretty, foreign hand. Looking at it I passed out of romance into the town. The avenue appeared common, ordinary; I was in the extraordinary; and it doubtless all would end in a commonplace explanation enough, I sighed to think.

The Italian consul had not reached his office. I turned back to my bankers. As I was passing out I met Obadiah Fogg, who took me by the coat.

“I have been looking for you, Gerald. It's lucky I have found you.”

I never have employed Fogg and Fogg, and I wondered at the interruption. The great lawyer (for I believe he is so called; I grant he is cunning, which goes far in

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America) regarded me curiously from his non-committal grey eyes.

“It’s of the utmost importance,” he repeated, when he reached his office, with the outlook on the calm figure of Washington dominating the steps of the treasury building.

“You were very indiscreet last night, Gerald,” Mr. Fogg began.

“What do you mean?”

“Even a man of your wealth can’t take the risk you have.”

“I don’t understand,” I began, now really alarmed.

“You court prosecution—”

“What have I done?”

“My clients—”

“And who the devil are your clients, Mr. Fogg?”

“Do n’t be profane, Mr. Gerald,” said this proper person; “very powerful people—”

“And what is the case against me?”

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“We have positive proof you harbored a madwoman —”

“Who is she?”

“Ah, that I can’t tell. But if you will surrender her —”

“I refer you to the Italian consul —”

“The Italian consul — ?” he began.

“You talk in enigmas. I did harbor a lady who appealed to me for protection last night. She did not appear mad to me, while the fellow who asked for her looked the rascal. The lady was looked after by my housekeeper. She has not given a clue to her identity, and if —”

“I can’t let you know for that matter. I only can advise you not to meddle.”

“That is to say?”

“To return her to the house next door.”

“But who are the people there?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“But I can find out.”

“They are there under fictitious names.”

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“ But how do they keep this mad-woman there — if she be mad ? ”

“ I can explain nothing ; a most unusual case. I only can advise you to let the matter go. The lady has been in the hands of her friends. If you think she is not insane, what experience have you that you all at once constitute yourself the expert ? ”

“ I will see the Italian consul first,” said I, still unconvinced.

“ I really advise you not to,” said the lawyer.

“ But I will, Mr. Fogg,” I replied obstinately ; “ and then if I see I have been acting foolishly, I will deliver the lady to her friends — when I may be convinced.”

“ I am sorry I can’t explain.”

“ You only have to convince me ? ”

“ But I can say no more.”

I looked out at the statue of Washington, on the street of the hurrying crowd.

“ Well, good day ! ” said I ; “ I do n’t like mysteries. I think I can find out.”

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“ You make a mistake, Mr. Gerald,” the lawyer called out solemnly. But I did not choose to retract.

The affair certainly was assuming a perplexing guise. If I had befriended this mad woman — this lady, I had not been so much a fool. I at least had harbored a superior person, although certainly I might be a fool to have done so; and here was a great lawyer reasoning with me, and the Italian consul invoked by the lady. If it were all very mysterious, I doubtless soon should know.

At the door a man, a groom-like person, stopped me.

“ Mr. Gerald ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ A gentleman wishes to speak to you in a carriage outside.”

“ Who ? ”

“ He will explain.”

My hansom was waiting, but I walked to the coupé the man indicated. The curtains were drawn; as I approached the

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door opened, when there was projected the head of the man who had been at my door the night before.

“We can talk better if you will step inside.”

I hesitated; but what danger could there be in Wall street? in the daylight? at the hub of all that was practical? ordinary, in a great nation? Nor was I inclined to show the feather now that the matter was plainly put. Again, I was curious for an explanation. I stepped into the cab. The door was closed.

“Well, sir?” said I. A pungent odor made me faint — suddenly dizzy; and I knew the cab was being driven rapidly; and that I was powerless to move; and then I was aware — it was after a long, dark interval — of being on my back in a little room that seemed to sway.

With difficulty I raised myself. I was in a ship-cabin, at sea; I could not be mistaken.

And all these occurrences I have writ-

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ten of here followed — as mysteriously as ever ; so mysteriously — strangely, unaccountably, that I hesitate now in telling them, lest I be called a story-teller. In some way it became clear to my aching head I was indeed alive ; that I had been abducted on Wall street in the light of American day and an American law ; that I was at sea. Through a port-hole was a stretch of distant, waving horizon.

And why was it so ? Into what hands had I fallen ? What powerful interest had I antagonized ? My predicament plainly was a sequel of the adventure of the night before. There my reason began and ended. For the matter was inexplicable. I only could be sure that this was not dream nor illusion ; for I made sure that I was alive, and that all had happened exactly as I have put it here. And with these assurances — which the sequel must make you believe — this narrative really begins.

Chapter V

How I am Carried Across the Sea

HERE was I in the strangest predicament ; here was mystery out of the house next door seizing my actual self ; that uncertainty of the great town we are loth to confess, which Louis Stevenson makes one feel in his New Arabian Nights. I could be certain, as I have said, there was no dream about it ; for, although my head ached and my mouth was dry, I was palpable, and the swish of the water and the thud of the engine left me no doubt at all.

I raised myself, to find I was lying in the berth fully dressed ; remembered that they only had had to take me to a boat at the foot of the street where I had been seized — for what purpose I could not

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fancy; only it was patent I had been meddling with a powerful person or interest; yet, not twenty-four hours since in my cousin's house I had been talking polite commonplaces. And now—I raised my face to a line with the port that framed the green, scattered with white-caps, against the blue of the farther distance, merging into gray, that suddenly glowed, with the splendor of the setting sun seeking the frothing crests of the waves. A black, irregular line marked a passing ship on the opposite tack, and I saw from the sun we were on a southeast course.

It was some time before I was able to collect my dazed mind enough even for these observations. I noticed then that the room showed the private steam yacht, the wood carving, the scattered toilet appointments, the size of the room, the motion of the vessel. I tried the door, but it was locked, when I turned back to a closer observation of the place. Some-

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thing carved on the wall caught my attention, and I leaned forward to study it in the fading light entering the port. This carving was skilfully done, and showed a boar and a fox rampant on a field azure, surmounted by a crown. I tried to place the device, which might mean anything or nothing, when at the moment the key turned in the door, which swung open, showing against a narrow corridor a very tall, bearded man, who looked at me attentively for a moment. He wore a dark-blue uniform, with buttons bearing the same device as on the woodwork in the cabin. I suppose I looked very pale, and indeed the motion — with the drug from which I was recovering — left a decided nausea, which the gust from the port through the open door relieved. I concluded this person was the skipper, for he bore evidence of belonging to the sea. For a moment we stood there staring at each other.

“ You would like something to eat,

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probably. That will make you feel better," said he, in very good French, and in a tone that, apart from the circumstance, sounded not uncivil. The manner and the pronunciation of the French (which, however, I thought was not his tongue) placed him at once a man who either had been born in gentle circumstances, or who had acquired some manner from association. I had time to reflect in the scrutiny he gave me that it did not profit particularly to rage and fume and call down the law which my captors evidently held themselves superior to; and so I asked in a voice sounding sepulchrally hollow simply for an explanation.

" You are at sea — a prisoner."

" I know that well; but whose prisoner? and what have I done? "

He shrugged his shoulders.

" I can't tell you, Monsieur. Your questions are entirely useless."

" But I can imagine it has something to do with an occurrence yesterday—"

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“ You need not question me, Monsieur. I have told you I can say absolutely nothing on that — or any subject.”

“ And I am to be kept here until — ? ”

“ Yes, until — ” He smiled. “ I may as well leave it ‘ until.’ But really, as you appear to be a man of sense, as you see I am a servant, you will not trouble me with useless questions.”

“ If they are useless — ? ”

“ They are, Monsieur,” he interrupted with gruff impatience. “ I can tell you only that you are to be kept. Antonio ! ” he called back into the corridor, when a little, dark waiter appeared with a tray. I told him to take the things away, as I certainly was not in a temper for food, when my reticent keeper insisted, with a return of his urbanity, that I doubtless should feel better for it after the drug I had been under. I thought possibly he might be right, as proved to be the case. He stood mutely watching me, until it was ended, I finding I could eat more than I

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had anticipated, and, indeed, feeling much better for it, as he said would be the case. When I had finished he motioned the waiter to remove the things, and then turning, without further word, left me, when I heard again the key on the outside.

The motion began to increase as it darkened, and the wind whistled outside the port, which I closed, for it was growing cold in the room. And then I lay down, to wake in the darkness to find my berth tipped at right angles, and the sounds of feet above ; for we had run into one of those stretches of gusty weather when the North Atlantic leaves a landsman sorry. A gusty night of whistling wind at sea is sufficiently depressing when in ordinary circumstances you wake, and listen to the thud of the engine, which seems to take the place of your heart-beats. How ominous it is when that regular beat of the pistons stops ! But my predicament was bad enough in any case, nor did it need the cessation of that sound to leave me serious.

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I ran over all the phases of the adventure from first to last. I had been warned by Obadiah Fogg, but too late. And what interest was it to that careful solicitor? I must be in the hands of some government. The letter I had delivered to the Italian consul pointed to that conclusion. And the woman plainly was some political suspect. That was clear to me now. I had meddled with an European political plot of some kind. I had been arrested against American law — against all law because — ; because “these people do not know how much the political suspect had told me.” But she had told me absolutely nothing. She had said she was running away from enemies — that was all. I had decided she was not a madwoman. I had remembered seeing her in Venice, and again in London, and on the last occasion in the company of people of rank; and she now had been strangely reticent. Her secret, whatever it was, was not for her to declare. She had been intercepted osten-

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sibly as a madwoman in New York. Her captors had held her in a rented house in the most marked neighborhood of the city, because there they would excite least attention. The yacht where I was a prisoner had been sent for her. It probably had arrived in New York harbor the night previous. I had been arrested because these persons did not know how much the woman had told me. But was she, too, on this vessel? Had they recaptured her after her escape to my protection the night before?

Yet for all the riddle was unsolvable, while the little steamship tossed in the grasp of the storm; still it remained a fearsome riddle. And as I lay sleepless the grey dawn crept in through the port, and it was a misty, tossing morning in the North Atlantic.

Again the key turned; again my keeper and the servant appeared. This time I had absolutely no word from him, or the servant, nor in the long, miserable days following did they answer me. I only

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heard the sailors' voices above, and their tramping; and the creaking of the ship, for it was a continuous seven days' storm. For I counted in this routine dismal day after dismal day until the number was seven; and I was almost crazy with my uncertainty of what would happen next.

I had been taken away so suddenly that I had had no time to notice in the newspapers the arrival of this foreign vessel in our harbor. I could not make any coincidences out of what I might have known. You see I ran over all possible solutions of my riddle, and all left me equally perplexed.

About noon, the seventh day, when I was ill of the sea and of inactivity, the cabin door was thrown open. Four sailors stood in the passageway with the man whom I have styled my keeper. He said something in a tongue that sounded like a Slav dialect to me — seeming to confirm my suspicion that there was the Russian hand in the affair. The four immediately

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seized, bound, gagged and blindfolded me. Of course I struggled, for who wouldn't with the sense of self-preservation. But I was weak with the long confinement. My arms seemed as puny as a child against their strength and numbers. And then I was carried out, and above, and was lowered, I surmised over the side, where I landed on the seats of a boat, that rose and fell unsteadily ; that presently was in motion at a command in the same Slav dialect. Time passed. The rain was on my face, wetting me through. And, then, we grounded. I was lifted out, the bonds untied, the gag, and, last, the bandage removed, when I found myself on my back with rain beating from the blackness. The steps were retreating, I raised myself, and saw the boat putting to sea. Far away was a single ship's light ; and that was all. The boat was swallowed by the mist. The breakers, that I had not noticed in my absorption in my fears, broke with regular thud on rocks below.

Chapter VI

How I Came to the Hut of the Shepherd of Saint Croix.

THE October wind carried the scurrying rain in sheets about the rock where I was. Watching the light of the vessel which I had left I presently saw it move; then vanish into the darkness. I probably saw with greater ease because of the bandage having schooled my eyes to gloom. I shivered and felt weak indeed after all I had been through. And then I rose to my feet, chattering like a man with fever; for a flash of intolerable heat followed. I half decided to remain there, and die, and have the fitful struggle over; and then a repulsion at death took my heart, and I began to walk inland over the unwooded fields that seemed to stretch to the water's edge. As I strode on the stiffness left me, and,

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despite the rain, a glow followed that was better than the turn of feverish heat I had had. Yet I was in bad plight; for I felt weak enough, even if I might feel stronger for a slight use of the muscles. I had stumbled on in this manner, the noise of the surf becoming every moment less, when I had an illusion of a lighting of the sky, like the distant glare on the low clouds of a town's lights. I often have heard persons who have been long in the dark of a storm at night speak of this same phenomenon. For really I saw nothing of the kind; it being merely an effect, blinding darkness on the eyeballs falsened by low vitality. Yet presently, stumbling over the uneven ground, a point of light appeared that at first I took to be part of the same phantasmagoria. But it persisted in presenting that welcome sign at this one point, until suddenly I brought close up on a low rambling building, when a dog barked. The light was outlined fitfully as if from a fire; and, throwing back the

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door without asking by your leave, I was dazed by some burning peat on an hearth. A collie sprang toward me, when, a querulous voice calling, and he slunk back. The owner of the voice was a rough figure in a sheepskin, kneeling — the flaring flame revealed — before a crucifix; and, without turning to make question of me beyond calling back the dog I stepped forward; when the heat of the place left me faint, and I sank down in an heap before the fire.

When I came to myself it was in this same interior, lying on some sheepskins on the floor, one thrown over me, a very old appearing man with a tangle of white beard reading from a little red book by a single candle stuck in a rude stick, the collie which had announced me snoring, as an old dog will before the flame.

“Where am I?”

The man looked at me a moment, when he answered in a *patois*, I seemed to understand :

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“With the Shepherd of Saint Croix.”

“Where?”

“Landes.”

“France?”

“Gascony.”

“Where are you from, friend?” He spoke as we were equals.

“From the sea.”

“You came near perishing in the storm,” he answered, looking me over curiously; and even then the wind shook the place. I saw he thought me mad; and suddenly it occurred my story would not be believed; no part of it. I who had disappeared in New York now was in France. But the circumstances attending my disappearance would be believed by no one. People would say that I had wandered away when temporarily insane. Probably my disappearance had been noted in the American papers. As I had a habit of going away on long journeys without announcing my intention, my friends might not be without hope of my ultimate

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return. But absolutely no one would, or, indeed, could believe that I had had the adventure which really had brought me to this portion of the French coast. My abductors had made the occurrence of such a kind that they could deny absolutely the mere evidence of my lips. A week ago men had envied me; and here my power was taken away and I was no more than puppet in others' hands. Lying there I saw suddenly the futility of all power, the mockery of Fate, which puts us all, sometimes even in this life, on the same democratic plane.

“The Christ sent you to me,” said the man, turning to me; and I saw in his eyes the look of the rapt enthusiast.

“Did He?” said I.

“Do not mock, man,” said the other, speaking now Parisian French. “I came here to live with the sheep on the moors because my life was failure.”

“I thank you, friend,” said I. Plainly, I must gain his favor, for I found that my

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captor, or captors, had left me neither money nor papers. I must have some way of explaining. I thought how difficult it would be when every consular office was besieged by mendicants with strange stories. And so I began to curry favor of him who called himself “Felix, Shepherd of Saint Croix.”

Of him I never knew, save that, as he had said, he had fled the world. Perhaps the clergyman of the living of Saint Croix knew. But for me he always has been a vague mystery—an heart that was kind out of religious devotion, a mind that had become attuned to the silences and the noises of the moors, to a sympathy with the sheep even, to a close friendship with no one excepting the old collie, who shortly became my friend.

For I remained some days in that desolate place, getting back my strength and wandering with the flock, listening to the shepherd, who had no words on any subject save those of him who believes in-

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tently. The man lived the life of the grey, bare November stretches of Gascon moor.

Even the mystery bringing me to that spot ceased to pique, until suddenly the longing for the world returned, as it must to all whose blood still is coursing. I told Felix my intention. Without denying me, he told me he was sorry to have me go, and that he would accompany me to Biarritz.

And there one morning at the town at the foot of the Pyrenees we appeared tramping along together, the shepherd in his skins. On the road near the town a trap came bowling along, with some men in knickerbockers and with golfing sticks. Civilization, the mode, polite life, followed the rude.

“Howell!” I cried. For one was John Howell, whom I remembered had a villa at Biarritz. The trap stopped. Howell stared; for I was almost unrecognizable with the growth of shaggy beard.

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“Lend me two louis,” I said. Again Howell stared. I turned to the shepherd.

“No,” said he. “We have broken bread together. Give the gold to the beggars.” I knew my mistake in offering him money, as he turned without another word after this queer exclamation; and I never have seen him again, although I have it now on my mind to write to the vicar of Saint Croix about Felix, the Shepherd.

“Where do you come from?” Howell began. The chance of meeting him at Biarritz was not particularly extraordinary, but that I should be at Biarritz was the extraordinary part of the adventure.

“I have been seeing life,” said I, half jokingly. “I want some money — some clothes.”

“Get up here,” he said, introducing me to the others, who scanned me with questioning eyes that almost had the better of their manners. I wonder they were not more curious. I must have appeared erratic enough.

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And we bowled into the American colony at Biarritz, where I was not unknown. By Howell's help I again appeared civilized. But I did not tell him of my adventure. He simply would think me mad. He thought I had been on a rough walking tour. But I myself pondered the mystery you may believe. I saw that Biarritz would not solve it; and three days after, having telegraphed Duesdale and my banker, I went up to Paris.

Chapter VII

How, if You Think Intently of a Mystery You May Arrive Near Its Solution.

IF THE people at Biarritz I knew had twitted me on my disappearance, which they had heard from the Parisian Herald and Galignani's, they had no American papers issued since, no information of that which had happened in New York. To see the last New York papers, to reassure my sister in Ireland, and to cable to my solicitor, were part of the reasons leading me to hasten to Paris, while another part was my earnest wish to get some light on the mystery. I had not told a soul in Biarritz, where formerly I had spent much time, lest they should consider I still was under the aberration lead-

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ing me to disappear in New York. But in Paris I would make inquiries. I had one certain clue in the arms carved on the woodwork of the cabin, while I surmised the lady might be known from my own observation in the box at the Criterion theater the previous year.

I reached the Gare D'Orleans about three that afternoon, and the porter was loading a box containing some things I had borrowed of Howell, when suddenly I saw a familiar face. The man stepped into a cab, apparently without observing me. If I were not mistaken this was the fellow who had enticed me into the adventure. Giving my man five francs I told him to keep the other cab in sight, when there began a chase—I knew not to what end. We turned from street to street, I not noticing the Parisian panorama to which I was returning, for breathless in the pursuit. Beyond the Arc de Triomphe my covey led, until at last the cab, evidently not knowing it was fol-

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lowed, drew up before an hotel on the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. The fellow left it. The door closed. I told my man to draw to the curb. After some hesitation I decided to go on, thinking of the chance throwing, in my way, a clue to the mystery which I was resolved not to neglect. Leaving the cab I walked to the door where was a plate bearing:

“Monseigneur Réux.”

I rang, asking for Monseigneur Réux on a venture.

“Yes, Monsieur, whom shall I say?”

“A Monsieur Gerald on an important matter.”

The servant scrutinized me, deciding to let me enter. I had risked seeing this Monseigneur Réux. I wondered what would come of it. The servant returning saying his master would see me, and he showed me into a simple room, bared of decoration, showing the habits and taste of the owner.

After some moments further, there en-

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tered by a side door a pale, dark, little man in a clerical coat. His smooth-shaven face, the slight figure, emphasized his youthful appearance, which nevertheless seemed to hold great cleverness. He knew the world, men, their foibles, intrigue. He looked me over, his grey eyes questioning.

“To what do I owe the pleasure, Monsieur ?”

“Because, Monseigneur, I wished to place the identity of the person who entered the house before me.”

“Massimo ! What is he to you ?”

But I saw the question had startled Monseigneur Réux.

“He is just from America.”

“True.”

“I, too, have arrived from America — against my will. Possibly Monseigneur may explain —”

The priest looked me over narrowly.

“I can’t explain what I do n’t know, Monsieur. I am only a poor mortal.”

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For the first time I hesitated at my foolhardiness in venturing into the power of an unknown person, who might be one, at least in purpose, with those who had abducted me.

“Monseigneur Réux, I do n’t know you—”

“I am a Dalmatian, Monsieur,” said he, “an humble servant of Rome.”

And then, suddenly, I recollected the name—Monseigneur Réux, the scholar, the diplomatist—the great Monseigneur Réux; and this youthful priest was so different from my expectation of what this personage should be.

“You are not the Gerald? the American Gerald,” began Monseigneur at last.

“Yes, Monseigneur Réux,” said I, remembering again the potentiality of the name my father had made, the sheer force of money; and after all I could buy men, I remembered. My sense of utter powerlessness left me, even before that cunning; yet noble Réux’s face always was. I

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now noticed a certain respect in Monseigneur's manner. The late Parisian afternoon lit his face, showing lines of thought, leaving him older.

“And what can you know of Massimo?”

“What should I know—? What should n’t I?”

“Humph—everything, nothing—that he is an agent of—”

“Of?” I began.

“A Dalmatian agent of the Czar,” said Monseigneur, as if defiantly. “But come, Monsieur, this person has agitated you. Nothing is accomplished for either of us by carrying on this conversation in riddles.”

“No,” said I. For I reflected here was a man who might understand the situation, and sheer chance had brought me to him—whether a good or bad chance time alone would show. But I would risk telling him my story, and I began with the lady I had seen on the Piazza San Marco

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—in London—in New York. He looked me over narrowly.

“Her Highness!” he cried. “You were the man.”

I told him the sequel.

“That was only natural,” he said. “You were meddling.”

“Meddling,” I began, “with what?”

Monseigneur Réux leaned forward suddenly, taking my hand.

“Monsieur, if I be priest, I am Dalmatian.” His eyes sparkled strangely. He pressed my hand, looking me over. “You are lucky—or unlucky. You have been involved in the fortune of the Romaga.”

“Do you mean—?” I began, remembering something.

“The Prince of Dalmatia, Mr. Gerald,” said Monseigneur Réux, in excellent English, “has entertained a suspicion of a plot to dethrone him, and to place on the Dalmatian throne the native house of the Romaga, who is represented by—”

“The lady I have seen—”

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“The Princess Beatrice Romaga — ”

“And — ? ” I began.

“The Russian government and Prince Frederick, by grace of the Czar, Prince of Dalmatia, decided to get possession of the Princess, whom two deaths have made head of the house of Romaga.”

“And she was arrested in — the United States ? ”

“Arrested in San Francisco — for Her Highness was traveling *incognita* with only three companions, and then was returning from Japan. The Romaga are rich, Mr. Gerald ; but the power of Russia is greater. Your department of state even permitted this arrest of the Princess Beatrice. No one knew of it. The persons — ”

“Including Monsieur Massimo — ”

“Yes, including the Baron Massimo, simply implied that they had a mad-woman. They remained in New York awaiting the arrival of Prince Frederick’s yacht from the Mediterranean. Here you

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appeared. The Princess escaped to your door — ”

“ And I am made to disappear — lest I know too much.”

“ Exactly. The Dalmatian yacht bringing you to Europe brought the Princess Beatrice as well.”

“ And she, Monseigneur ? ”

“ Is a prisoner at Thara, in Dalmatia, by this time.”

“ And how will she be treated ? ”

“ As a prisoner of state — to hold in check the Dalmatian plotters who want to replace the House of Heidelberg by that of Romaga.”

“ Their success would mean, I understand then, the Princess Beatrice on the throne ? ”

“ And English interest in Dalmatia.”

“ Does the Princess herself favor the movement — ? ” I began.

Monseigneur Réux shrugged his shoulders.

“ Ah, sir, princes are but the puppets of

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destiny — of political change. Russia and the House of Heidelberg think they hold the matter in check because they have the hereditary head of the Romagas ! ”

“ But they have not ? ” I asked that I might know whether they really had this incipient rebellion checked.

“ I did not say that,” Monseigneur answered. I asked him, then, why the Princess Beatrice had asked me to carry a letter to the Italian consul.

“ Because she naturally thought, her mother having been of the House of Sardinia, the Italian government might interfere — ”

“ In short,” said I, after a moment, “ I have stumbled on an European complication.”

“ Which has to do with the Russian ascendancy in the Southeast.”

“ How is it that such a matter could be kept quiet — ? ” I began.

“ How is everything done — by the

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hand of power, Monsieur," said the priest, relapsing into French.

"And I take it," I began, "that Monseigneur Réux sympathizes with the House of Heidelberg in Dalmatia —"

"You forget I am priest —"

"Is not the Romaga interest the church's interest in Dalmatia — ?"

"Yes, and I, Monsieur, am of the House of Romaga."

"And how then, Monseigneur, am I to explain the presence of the Baron Massimo, the avowed agent of the Dalmatian government, in Monseigneur's house ?"

In an instant Monseigneur's eyes sparkled almost defiantly, and again triumphantly.

"Men have been bought —"

"And Massimo ?"

"Is ours — for the moment. You can't tell how such a fellow will turn."

"It appears," said I, surprised at myself, "that the plot for the Romaga continues in Dalmatia ?"

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“I did not say that, Monsieur.” But his eyes gave me the answer. I suddenly seemed to have become an acute student of physiognomy. I suddenly was wondering at myself, and then I knew that it was only my father’s spirit in me — the spirit that wanted to dominate men, and was restless when others subdued it. This Dalmatian conspiracy had made me its puppet so far. I would take an hand. But was Monseigneur Réux sincere? Was he with the Romaga really? I would risk it; for I must take the risk; and I began.

“I should like dearly, Monseigneur Réux, to help the cause of the Romaga in Dalmatia out of —”

“Out of revenge.”

“Exactly; and the desire for action of some kind.”

“True. You have been through much. But how may I be sure of your sincerity.”

“Is not what I have suffered from your political enemies sufficient?”

The Puppet

“It should be,” he began musingly.
“But, Monsieur, what can you do?”

“I can contribute to the revolutionary fund,” I began.

“True,” said he softly.

“What else can I do? I can’t call on my government to resent the outrage, for it appears I was interfering with the arrest of a political offender, or suspect, by the Dalmatian police. At any rate such a course will be tedious—a matter of months—”

“Mr. Gerald, it is late,” interrupted Monseigneur Réux, “but I trust you will dine with me. We shall be quite alone, and after coffee some Dalmatian gentleman may happen in.”

Chapter VIII

How I Leave Paris for Thara in Dalmatia

I EVEN now cannot resist surprise at the current of events which now bore me on irresistibly. For to the accidents which in a month had changed all my life, and its purpose — which had involved me in complications seemingly nearly impossible for me to have any connection with at all, there was now added my only reckless wish to be no longer the puppet of the destiny that seemed to have taken up this period of my career, but to control it. Possibly Monseigneur Réux's charm of manner may have influenced me, possibly my memory of the Princess Beatrice. But whatever the reasons I burned my bridges as merrily as a boy, reckless of conse-

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quence. I ingratiated myself into Monseigneur Réux's confidence before that dinner was over. He with his more impetuous Dalmatian nature could understand how I felt; and finally took me into his further confidence to the point of letting me know that Massimo, whose acquaintance I had made so unpleasantly in New York, doubtless was stirring up the very rebellion that he had been trying to thwart by the arrest of the Princess Beatrice. "How otherwise does he dare come to me? Or it may be that he is here to find out our plans. He shall know nothing."

"But I?" I began.

"Your story, Mr. Gerald, I know to be absolutely true."

"And you know then I can be trusted?"

"I can read my human nature," Monseigneur Reux laughed. "Yes, when you once may be committed," he added.

We were still over our coffee — for I had not gone on to my hotel to dress, nor

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to Duesdale — who was that year on the English legation — nor to my bankers to make inquiries. My interest in the affair was too absorbing, and became more so when three Dalmatian gentlemen entered, the Marquis Bianchi, Signor Redi, and the Count Paoli Balbi; and we began to talk Italian over the situation — a tongue I understand very well from some experience in Italy. The Dalmatians have continued to speak Italian since their land was a fief of the Venetian republic, and many of their great family names are Italian to this day.

At first these gentlemen regarded me with some suspicion, when I recklessly told them I would contribute out of my own resources a very considerable sum toward the cause of the Romaga. Monseigneur Réux assured them of my sincerity, and the personal experiences interesting me in the Dalmatian situation. When they were convinced they talked to me with greater affability. They, too, agreed that Massimo, in approaching

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Monseigneur Réux, had not dropped his character of Russian agent. I was glad to hear this for I hesitated to think what I might do if the Signor Massimo had appeared in that room. I certainly might have tried on him a good left-hander. However, that contingency did not appear, and I really felt better over the position I had taken when I found that I had the Signor Massimo's wiles to fight against.

One point was clearly brought out by this little conference, and that was the importance of crossing the Adriatic from Venice to Thara, and freeing the Princess Beatrice. As soon as she had been freed a bloodless revolution would follow, every one decided, agreeing that the governmental policy in seizing the young lady who is hereditary head of the Romaga was founded on strong common sense ; it was equally common sense in the adherents of the Romaga to defeat this purpose.

The Venetian adventure charmed me ;

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and I asked to be of it. At last this was allowed, my enthusiasm carrying my end, I believe. For I thought of the Princess Beatrice. Once she had thrown herself on my protection, and now I should try to help her. How any practical gentleman, of American extraction, or of the City in London, would have ridiculed me.

Yet, neither did my new friends, nor I myself, underrate the danger of the attempt which put me at once completely beyond any chance of my own government's protection. At once I became avowedly a political intriguer, a meddler in the policy of another nation. But the spirit of adventure stirred, and my blood was warm for the undertaking, and all my previous life seemed to have had an hopeless monotony from which now I possibly might escape. Nor do I expect my father's friends to understand this statement. My father would, as he only made his success through having imagination.

I did, indeed, I'll say, remember my

The Puppet

duties. I wired both New York and my sister, and looked up Lord Duesdale, one of my best friends, who rated me soundly on my trick of disappearance. But I did not explain even to him. I considered that Monseigneur Réux had made me a confident, that my honor was pledged to the plot for the restoration of the Romaga in Dalmatia.

A week later I was *en route* for Venice, where, one evening, I sat again at a table at Florian's — where first I had seen Beatrice Romaga — and where, as on that occasion, the restlessly gay Venetian crowd surged past, and San Marco faced the scene, its brilliancy merged into the darkening blue; where today appears like yesterday, and tomorrow will be but as today — if the sky be still blue, as it is likely to be in Venice.

Chapter IX

How We Sailed Out of Venice at Daybreak.

TO BE rowed out of Venice at dawn, while your gondolier sings, and the craft that is to bear you on the Adriatic lies at the edge of the lagoons — this is to enter at once into the unmapped land of imagination, while the canals, the palaces, the red-stained sails of the luggers, take on an infinite variety. It was still as we walked the piazza where the doves were cooing, and Venice slept; still as we embarked on the gondolas waiting in the Grand canal, and over all was that mystery of God, which, weary of the sordidness of life — of the struggle for the survival of the fittest — we call Beauty; the mystery of color, of the sea, and the fanciful city.

Five gondolas held Balbi, Reni, me, and

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Balbi's twelve men from his Tuscan estates. Monseigneur (since he has been created Cardinal) Réux, who really had planned the expedition, we had left in Paris. He was a cousin of the Princess Beatrice Romaga, his mother having been of that family. His cleverness was behind the whole expedition—which was, in its nature, foolhardy, yet if it succeeded the very step to take to foil the policy of the reigning German house in Dalmatia. Balbi and I talked it over. The Count's black eyes flashed, and he looked very brave, very handsome, while the sea breezes fanned his face, bringing a languid color there. Francesco Balbi was a young man, but his race traced itself to the Romans. In the old days his family had preserved an independence in a Tuscan fastness against king, prince, duke, and city, and now there was something of that old blood kindling him to the adventure. Signor Reni is an older man than either Balbi or I. He may be fifty, or any age

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almost ; yet his muscles are lithe, his wit quick. He was here because he was first a Dalmatian, and because he hated the foreigners who occupied the throne. He sooner would have had the red republicans possessing Dalmatia ; preferred almost anarchy. And so he, too, was on this expedition.

And I — ? I had no reason save that I had been piqued ; because I was weary of the ordinary ; and because I had the yellow hair and dark eyes of Beatrice Romaga always in my mind.

Near the Lido a sloop was waiting and, paying our gondoliers, and, the wind being favorable, we put to sea. The master, a Dalmatian, was in the secret, and that we intended a landing near the coast fortress of Bergamo, where we had information the Princess Beatrice was detained. The men from Balbi's Tuscan estates did not once question their master's right to do exactly as he wished, for mediævalism still lingers in that part of Tuscany.

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The morning wind whistled softly in the shrouds. The garrulous, inquisitive Venetian gondoliers were left astern; and the panorama of roof and tower of the sea-port city. In all the world are Constantinople, New York and Venice most distinguished by the sea, which surrounds them all and lends them beauty — and the sweep of the wind out of the spaces — and the opportunities for the commerce that humbles the world.

We beat out toward the sun. The sailors sang. The gorgeousness of the colors changed into grey and blue and bright yellow, and the day was over the Adriatic; and back in the canals Venice was stirring sleepily, and the many-colored sails of the fishing craft scattered the horizon.

The day passed lazily. We talked over our plans, and Balbi and I grew into that warm friendship, which lasted until his death in that hard fight of which I have to tell. Reni, an older man, while I know

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him well, never has been so near me as Francesco Balbi was.

It was long past dusk when we heard the breakers on the Dalmatian coast, not far from Bergamo, which (in ancient time a stronghold of the Romaga, who held out there against the Venetian corsairs) was then a political prison of the government of Frederic of Heidelberg. Our vessel hove to, and we embarked over the side into the mystery of that coast.

My father had followed trade, using keener wit than others at his calling ; but back of us all (for I can't believe the Geraldis always were simple peasants) back of us were long years when our ancestors, whether we knew it or not, likely followed arms as a trade — when position was kept by the strong and might was right, as, indeed, who shall say is not even now not infrequently the case. And today that old something — the sleeping savagery — possessed me, as we disembarked under the stars on the coast of Dalmatia.

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Balbi marshalled his dozen men, and, knowing that all depended on effrontery, we approached the keep of Bergamo, which was outlined in huge mass on its rock over the Adriatic. Balbi went boldly to the draw and rang. A Dalmatian soldier appeared sleepily with a lantern, the first person we had seen since we landed. Balbi pushed past him, calling to us to follow, and we entered with drawn pistols onto the court, where already was confusion, and the commandant rushing down half-dressed to ask the explanation of this unexpected assault.

“ You surrender ? ”

The Dalmatian looked about him at an half-dozen men, evidently the whole force of the place. They appeared grotesque in their uniform, which resembles the Servian — a mixture of Russian and German appointments, with a perfect disregard of appropriateness.

Our commandant, after some parleying, concluded, since we were inside his

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works, to surrender, which he did lamely, explaining, however, that it was a matter of pay to him that he served the House of Heidelberg instead of that of Romaga. Never, I suppose, except in South America — where they indeed sometimes kill two or three — was a revolution inaugurated so bloodlessly.

Balbi and Reni went to inform the Princess, leaving me to man the works with our peasants, and to look over our half-dozen prisoners, which I did as well as I could considering I had no previous military training. In the great hall of the keep — a barren, rough place not changed since the thirteenth century — my friends returned with the head of the house for which they had inaugurated this revolt.

She came down the great stair calling to us below, her face flushed, the light of the candles and from the log on the hearth tangled in her hair.

“Thank you, gentlemen,” she said prettily. “Thank you, much.”

The Puppet

I believe we cheered, although there were so few of us, for Beatrice, Princess of Dalmatia, Countess of Spezia in Sardinia.

She appeared in this setting different from her who had fled to my door now it seemed so long ago.

“And, Monsieur,” she said; for she does not speak English, “I have made you a deal of trouble.”

“No, I have assumed the trouble,” I said, as she extended her hand graciously.

“Let us hope there will be no more. There’s a great risk in this—”

“Not to him who dares,” said I looking into her eyes; and I fancied she blushed; and then she passed on and left us for a further conference with the Count and Signor Reni.

That night messengers were sent right and left, summoning the country-side to revolt. Balbi and Reni were sleepless, although I succumbed toward dawn, there appearing little enough for me to do. At

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dawn I walked into the court, looking out on the bare, brown hills. A red banner bearing the black hound of the Romaga was flying from the tower. Many strangers—some peasants, some evidently of the upper class, were gathered in the court. The country plainly was aroused, and I wondered at the outcome—even as I heard the commandant we had surprised yesterday, say to another person of some evident quality, that he had gone over to the Romaga.

Chapter X

How I Discover the Fickleness of Fortune when Her Favors are Conferred by a Dalmatian Constituency.

I READ the other day a romance, of which many people are talking, about a man who played the part of a king. Reading it, I thought of my own experiences in this matter when I helped in an endeavor not altogether dissimilar. Yet when I read that romance I called it a faery tale, an Arabian Night, forgetting that my own experience was quite as strange when I entered on that rebellion in Dalmatia — a rebellion that for the first few days promised well.

For, as I have said, the Dalmatian gentry, the peasantry, appeared to welcome us. During those few days representa-

The Fickleness of Fortune

tives of the different Dalmatian parties came — to see, as the sequel proved, if they might not better themselves by serving the rebellion for the Romaga. We already in three days were so strong — half the country, a disorderly rabble of picturesque peasants and mountaineers camped about Bergamo — that it was declared the government feared to give us battle; and we only were waiting our time to march on Thara. So busy was our girlish leader with her numerous conferences with her minister, Signor Reni, and with the various persons who wished to find her position regarding their interests that I saw little of her. She would pass in the great room of the keep, with a nod, or I might see her mounted for some expedition into the country, when she looked, I thought, very pretty, and yet too girlish for all these new responsibilities. But I rarely saw her alone. For my part I too was busied assisting Count Balbi, in trying to make out of our recruits something

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of an army, which indeed might not have been much less inefficient than the Dalmatian regulars of the reigning Prince. And so I was surprised when a servant brought me word one afternoon that the Princess wished to see me in the garden of Bergamo.

The place while bare-limbed at that season, showed that it might be gorgeous with roses like a Florentine field in June. But I thought the girlish princess answered for the roses as she came to meet me, smiling graciously, although I fancied her face pale and worn. When we first had come to her rescue she had not appeared in this way, although she had been restrained of her liberty. I indeed felt concerned for her, as I bowed in the little formal way the etiquette of the improvised court already prescribed; nor, indeed, did I know her well. A single attendant, a wrinkled old Dalmatian in a red skirt, was with her. She herself was in a riding habit that showed wear.

The Fickleness of Fortune

“I wanted to thank you again, Monsieur Gerald,” said she, graciously, “particularly as I have heard of you from Monseigneur Réux.”

“Monseigneur Réux is very good.”

“He is my cousin,” said she, “and more on his account than on any other I have yielded to this part I am playing.”

“It is naturally your part,” said I, not thinking of my phrases or that she was a great lady, no less an one than a sovereign should we establish her.

“Your gallantry aside, I suppose it is, Monsieur Gerald. But why should I, a girl without particular ambition, be left to act a man’s part? If my brother, my father, had lived!”

I looked at her in some wonder, not quite understanding.

“I am loath to believe, your Highness, that —”

“That I do not care to be the Princess of Dalmatia. Do you know why I tell you this?”

The Puppet

“It is gracious of you.” I had been right. She was after all but a girl.

“Because you being a foreigner can look on the situation here without a Dalmatian’s prejudice.”

“Possibly.”

“And how does it seem to you — our chances?”

“That we shall win,” I remarked discreetly, and wondering if that glorious hair — worn by some ancestor of hers — might not have inspired some of the Venetian painters. I had not seen the Titian then.

“You say that because it is the proper thing to say to me. The words express no opinion of your own.”

“How can I have an opinion, your Highness? I do not know Dalmatia.”

“No,” said she, softly; “nor I, save that I do not wish to make the Dalmatians trouble.”

“The situation has made you trouble enough,” said I, forgetting that this lady

The Fickleness of Fortune

was my superior, removed by the impassable barrier of caste.

“ Yes, trouble enough ; I have been approached again and again to countenance the Dalmatian party of revolt. I wanted to be free, like you, Monsieur Gerald, to follow my own wishes. Lately I thought I was free — for some months. I went travelling like — like an English girl, only to be seized, arrested because in Thara they thought me dangerous. I am not, Monsieur Gerald.”

I wanted to tell her then and there that she certainly was delightfully girlish, but dangerous. But of course I did not dare.

“ But why, Your Highness, when you came to me in New York did you not tell me,— ? ”

“ Because it was not my secret. I could not involve Dalmatia.”

“ And now ? ” I asked curiously.

“ It is Henri Réux’s, my cousin’s plot. It is this,” she added, as if to herself.

The Puppet

“My cousin, and his and my friends consider that once established the Powers may agree to uphold us. He believes,—we believe,—that a decided action on our part may lead —”

“To you as Princess of Dalmatia.”

“Already has led,” she said almost wearily. “And now that the position is almost established again,—no more freedom for me.” She said this as an English, or American girl, might have spoken. “I must marry whom they dictate. I must become a creature of statecraft.”

I wondered why she was talking to me in this strain,—there in the wintry garden of Bergamo.

“I feel,” she said softly, as if reading me, “after what you have done for me that we are friends, and I wanted to tell you I am sorry that you have become involved with me — in this,—affair.”

“It is good of Your Highness,” I answered, “to show this interest. And you may be sure I am glad.”

The Fickleness of Fortune

“Are you, Signor Gerald?” said she, speaking Italian. “Now really are you?”

“I shall be indeed always,” when she laughed merrily so that I wondered. But at the moment we heard a voice,—Signor Reni’s,—the Minister’s. “That’s so conventional a remark, Signor Gerald,” said the Princess.

“Your Highness—”

The Princess started I thought. She had not heard him probably.

“Ah, Signor Reni,” said she. “I have been talking to Signor Gerald, and thanking him for all the interest he has taken in our affairs.”

“Signor Gerald has been very good,” the older man acknowledged, yet looking me over suspiciously I fancied, “very good. I am sorry to interrupt—”

“And what is it, Signor?” said the girlish head of the ancient Romaga.

“The council with Your Highness’ approval have decided to advance on Thara.”

The Puppet

“I like that,” said the Princess Beatrice, her eyes flashing. “At last we shall act.”

“Prince Frederick fears to come to us.”

“Poor Prince Frederick,” she said smiling, “and then we shall go to my cousin.”

Her eyes flashed, and she looked then the proud Romaga,—with the blood of an hundred of the greatest Italian and Dalmatian families in her veins. A little wind stirred the bare rose branches. The old Dalmatian attendant stood immovable at the back of the garden.

“I beg Your Highness’ pardon,” I began. But neither the Princess, nor Signor Reni, noticed me particularly. Affairs of moment had put me out of mind; and, for some reason, I was sorry I had undertaken my part,—that having been once a puppet in this Dalmatian affair I should choose to remain one,—with the vain expectation of being later something more. I suppose my foolish pride was hurt, as I went back to my duty, then, which was in putting some military form into our Dal-

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matians. I declare I knew, or know, nothing of tactics. Count Balbi dubbed me a colonel of the new Dalmatia, under the rule of the Princess of the Romaga. But if I occupied a military position I had no uniform. The rough tweeds which I had worn when I entered Venice still served me, and these indeed were rather better than the tattered variety of clothing the Dalmatians boasted. We indeed only had seven uniforms,—those of the soldiers and the commandant of Bergamo, Colonel Pinaro, who served, now that he thought it would be the winning one, the cause of the Princess Beatrice. His was the first defection to us. Within seven days some seven hundred persons, not so many as I had expected, declared for the Princess Beatrice, and it was said that Frederick of Heidelberg was preparing to flee Thara for Austria,—news Signor Reni had brought the Princess when he had interrupted us in the garden of Bergamo.

The Puppet

But if this were but the truth I was startled by that I saw as I stepped on to the ramparts. Some soldiery were defiling on the plain below; and our adherents were scattering right and left. I could make no doubt of the truth of my eyes. Men were running in the camp below,— and at the moment I heard Balbi's voice ordering down the ancient draw.

“And where are your six soldiers, and Colonel Pinaro, the commandant?”

“They, too, have gone.”

“There are easily fifteen hundred men below.”

“Easily.” The Count uttered an oath — in which I shared,— at those Dalmatians who ran.

“We have no more than my servants, — the force with which we left Venice.”

“And these reports Signor Reni is even now giving the Princess that Prince Frederick has left the country?”

“They were spread designedly.”

“And what of the country being ready

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for revolt if the standard of the Romaga once were raised?"

"Did not these people flocking to us seem to prove it — ?" he asked lamely.

"And now the government forces seem to attract them the other way," I said bitterly. "Your Dalmatians appear to run to the side they consider the strongest."

"They but consider their own skins," said Count Balbi, smiling even in face of the evident disaster, our misplaced hopes, the deceit, the false reports that had been practiced on us even in face of an apparent strength,—our real weakness that I never had expected even in the beginning of the undertaking. We were surrounded. There was only the ancient draw between us and the government forces. The Princess doubtless would be pardoned, but as for the rest of us we likely should hang from the ramparts of the castle. To be sure there was the narrow channel the draw covered between our rocks and the main land. Behind was the Adriatic over

The Puppet

which the sun was sinking ; before the low plain along which the governmental forces approached.

“They have two cannon,” I said at last. “What strength has a place like this against cannon ?”

“None,” said the brave leader of this insufficiently considered plot. And Monseigneur Réux was safe in Paris. I smiled bitterly ; and then a feeling of rage shook me. While there was breath, at least I could fight. How many times had my father been defeated if the world had known.

“We must practice strategy, my dear Count.”

“But what strategy is left us ?”

“From my observation of Dalmatians, they prefer to negotiate rather than to fight even a small force like ours. Your Italian peasants are armed and will fight.”

“But these Dalmatians who come to us,—and then run over to the government,—as soon as it appears,—and then

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even tried to betray us,—as they easily could," Balbi said, as if trying to defend Dalmatia,—although most incoherently.

"I suppose really they like the show of fighting better than the reality." He had a smile that was cynical, rather than humorous. If there were humor in the situation, we were the victims of the joke; and even a brave humorist is not inclined to laugh when the question of his life is the one at issue.

"Well then the point is, that we can have a chance to parley with them about the terms of our surrender."

"Then — ?" he began. "But what difference can that make?"

"It can give us time at least."

"Ah, that is true."

"Time is precious now."

"Ugh, yes," he said, thinking of his possible fate.

"And there is the sea back of us?"

"But how can we get down this rock? and our boats are useless,—for a voyage."

The Puppet

“After dark,—if we can keep them off until after dark,—we may devise something.”

“That is impossible,” he said, morosely rehearsing all that was against us.

“Ah, it may be,” I said, “but I must catch at a straw. I have no particular wish to hang on that rampart,—a feast for the crows. Now, permit me to advise this much. Send down one of your trusted servants—”

“Jacopo?”

“Yes, Jacopo. And ask by him to have the government force wait until the leader can consult with the Princess. It is obvious that,—beyond executing us as enemies to the public order,—that the govermental—”

“Which is the Russian policy.”

“Yes, exactly, the Russian policy will wish to consider the Romaga.”

“You are clever, Signor.”

“Ah, I have to be.”

“I’ll follow your plan.”

The Fickleness of Fortune

“And I,— I will change the tenor of Signor Reni’s news to the Princess.” I still was piqued at my dismissal ; and certainly the Princess should know the truth, — in any event.

And leaving him to send the messenger I went back into the garden of the keep at Bergamo to put the matter before her who really had involved me in the matter.

Signor Reni, and indeed the Princess Beatrice herself, looked their surprise as I interrupted them unceremoniously , for, as I have said, there was already at Bergamo some Court ceremonial.

Chapter XI

How we Obtain a Respite From Baron Massimo

“YOU were wrong, Signor Reni.”

“What do you mean, Colonel Gerald?” he said, using the title Count Balbi had conferred, and of which I never have been particularly proud, colonels being as numerous in Dalmatia as in the Southern United States. Signor Reni’s voice had disdain that I should dare to interrupt him. I thought myself for the first time that I was wrong in breaking the news so suddenly to the Princess Beatrice, and, then, I decided again that this was as well.

“Yes wrong,” I said, disregarding the other’s manner; “for the government army has not deserted. On the contrary — ”

We Obtain a Respite

“ Impossible.”

“ The people you thought were with us all have left, like rats from a sinking ship — as soon as they saw Prince Frederick’s banner.”

“ Impossible ! ” he said again, while the Princess Beatrice too looked on with wonder in her dark eyes.

“ Go outside, and see then,” I cried ; for I had lost my temper, and was impatient at this play of rebellion which staked our lives. I had no wish to die that moment. At first looking me over vindictively, he decided to inquire of the truthfulness of my statement. When he had gone, I turned to the Princess, who still appeared incredulous.

“ I beg your pardon,” said I, losing heart, although I did not know for what I was apologizing.

“ You need not ask me that,” said she softly. “ This means — ”

“ That all is a farce, your Highness.” I thought there were tears.

The Puppet

“Don’t, Princess Beatrice, I pray you. You are a young lady of spirit,—a great person. And, now, you must bear the honor of your race. These Dalmatians are not worthy you—”

She smiled suddenly.

“What can I do, Colonel Gerald?”

“This; in an half hour a messenger of the government will be here. You will receive him. You will acknowledge the attempt has failed. But you will add that you wish time to consider,—to see if you cannot propose terms—”

“I will gladly,” she cried her face flushing; and I knew that her momentary loss of self-control had not been on her own account.

“You will ask, Your Highness, until to-morrow morning. If that time is not granted you must declare that you will make an hopeless fight, which certainly will result in the loss of some lives, and—”

“And,—I understand,—they seeing I

We Obtain a Respite

mean what I shall say,—will grant the request,—to prevent bloodshed."

"I believe such will be the result, Your Highness."

"And then? when we have the time?"

"Leave that to me," said I with bravado, although I knew at that moment no more what I should do than the merest child. Only it was clear that I must act for myself,—for her; and that I did not dare leave the issue to her advisers.

"I will, Colonel Gerald," said she softly. "I leave all to you, and I believe in you."

I raised her hand to my lips, and in that act Signor Reni,—his pale face ashen,—interrupted us.

"It's true!" he said, "true."

"Did the Marquis send Jacopo as I suggested?" I began.

"Yes. What of it?"

"Signor Reni," interrupted the Princess. "I will manage this affair. Report to me when the messenger returns. Come

The Puppet

Colonel Gerald, into the castle. I will see this with my own eyes."

"If you will allow me, Your Highness," I answered, "I would better consult with Count Balbi."

Signor Reni regarded me still with that little vindictive stare; and yet, I saw that fear for himself was his principal emotion.

"Come, Signor Reni," said I, as if I had all the authority in the world; when he followed me as if he thought I might arrive at some expedient. The Princess hesitated, and, then seeing that I was trying my best to solve our riddle, she turned without a word through the little postern door into the great hall of Bermago.

"I have been a fool, Signor Reni."

"Eh, Signor?"

"Ever to have entered on such an ill-arranged affair."

"We did our best, Signor," he said with surprising humility which had its source I knew in his fears.

We Obtain a Respite

“ Yet you are a brave man,” I said, changing my tone, “ to have dared it. I respect brave men.” I really believed he was brave; any man would have had some fears under circumstances such as these.

“ But now, Signor Count, I choose to direct this matter myself. It is but self-preservation.” I expected him to tell me to keep my place; but instead he asked:

“ And what can we do — ? ”

“ Leave it to me, Signor; I have a way.”

“ And I acknowledge I have none,” which completed my ascendancy over Signor Reni.

But I shuddered as I thought how poor my way was; for I actually knew of none. Yet I did not dare show the two leaders this, for I no longer trusted to them. I acted as if I knew the exact way out of the difficulty. That Balbi believed in me, or, like Reni, grasped at any proposition relieving him from the

The Puppet

responsibility, was proven by the readiness with which he had sent the messenger to the approaching forces of the government. In the meantime I was scanning sea and land. The van of the attacking party had paused a short distance away on the browned plain. The hour,—it now was twilight,—was singularly still, and I noticed the sea was almost unruffled. On one side of the great square tower that anciently had dominated this coast in the interest of the robber Romaga was a window. I looked at the coast line below; and instantly an idea occurred, which led me to look at the hesitating line of Prince Frederick's soldiery. The sky was overcast, and it promised a dark night.

At the moment I heard Balbi order the lowering of the draw, and I saw Balbi's messenger, Jacopo, approaching with another person. As this individual came into view over the rusty draw, I recognized the little sly fellow with whom the adventure had begun in New York, the

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one man in this world whom I thought I hated for having done me a positive injury.

“The Baron Massimo,” Reni said at my shoulder.

Massimo advanced smilingly toward us awaiting him in the outer court. Six of Balbi’s peasants were distributed about armed with the muskets and knives we had succeeded in taking from Venice. We indeed had munitions for a thousand men. We had been seven hundred that morning; now, all told, we were seventeen.

I say that Massimo advanced toward us like a gentleman who enters an house on a formal invitation; and as if to impress us further with his sense of the formality of the occasion he addressed us in French, which is still in many parts of the world the language of diplomacy.

“Ah, Messieurs,” said he, “I am sorry the occasion is so unfortunate for you—”

“And yet, if I remember aright,” said Balbi, who had turned about from raising

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the draw, "the Baron Massimo himself showed some interest to Monseigneur Réux in this very affair."

"To get knowledge from fools, Messieurs," Massimo said at this.

"Such," I could not resist saying, "was Monseigneur Réux's idea of the nature of the Baron Massimo's errand."

He turned to me at this, his face darkening, looking sarcastically at the sword I had buckled about my tweeds, the only insignium of my position as Colonel in this episodical Dalmatian rebellion.

"You are still meddling, Mr. Gerald," he said in English. "You do not appear to have profited by the lesson I gave you. But you doubtless never will meddle again."

"That depends —"

"On the future, Mr. Gerald. I think that is mine,— Prince Frederick's, if I mistake not. I know you feel unpleasantly toward me,—"

"Ah, no, Baron," said Balbi, who had

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recovered his sang-froid ; “ we admire your wit which suffered you to intrigue with us,—so that if we should succeed you might profit by that turn of circumstances.”

“ You may admire my bravery, Marquis Balbi, which leads me here into your power,—when as General Barnato told me,—you might hold me as an hostage.”

“ Pardon me,” said I here ; “ you doubtless knew that this would have been foreign to the Princess Beatrice’s nature,—if not to ours. You knew you ran no risk. As for my Lord, the Count’s remark on you trying to play two parts, I myself believe you approached Monseigneur Réux simply as a spy.”

“ You are quite right,” said he, looking at me out of eyes of which he now held the expression hidden.

“ And the meantime we are keeping the Princess waiting.” I myself led the way to the great hall of the castle where the candles had been lit, and where our mis-

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tress (for I will now confess I regarded her as mine) was seated in an arm chair with her woman, and two of Balbi's servants making her little court.

If I had trembled how, girl as she was, she would conduct herself at this crisis, I was more than surprised by the admirable self-possession of her who looked that moment the head of the ancient Romaga. Her yellow hair seemed a crown; her eyes flashed, and her cheeks were flushed with the excitement of the moment.

“Well, Baron Massimo, I am no longer your prisoner.” And there was in her tone the least resentment at this agent of the Dalmatian government which had tricked her and deprived her of liberty. Massimo inclined his head, not discourteously.

“You were detained, Your Highness, to avoid other people losing their lives on your account in a fruitless attempt to overturn the government of Dalmatia. As it is now, your case,—not your individual

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case,— but that of your followers is worse. Some will lose their lives for rebellion — ”

I stepped forward, half expecting her to cry out at this.

“ That is the point, Baron Massimo,” the Princess said calmly enough, although her face grew white and I knew her manner was but a mask. “ My friends have been wrong in forcing me into this — ”

“ Yes, plainly wrong.”

“ And I suppose they must suffer the consequence.”

“ Pay the penalty, Your Highness.”

“ But this erroneous course, Baron Massimo, has been taken for me,— for my House. I cannot see them suffer without making an effort — ”

“ But you can do nothing, Your Highness.”

“ Whether I can or not I want this night to consider it,— some plea to make to the government.”

“ It can come to nothing.”

She rose at this, her eyes flashing.

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“Baron Massimo,” she cried, “if you do not concede this, you, and your army, shall not get into Bergamo until all my friends have died in defending it. Is it not better for brave men to die fighting than on the scaffold? I cannot deny them this privilege. If they fight some of the government troops shall die as well as they,” she added, her voice which had begun in declamation ending in a whisper.

Massimo plainly was impressed by her words and manner.

“But,” she continued more quietly, from her chair, “if I take reasonable time to devise some means of presenting these gentlemen’s cases to the government, I can say to them, ‘there is a chance, my friends.’ Resistance simply means deaths, for we are a small company in an old disused fortress.”

“But, Your Highness — ”

“You have heard,” she answered. “Have you power to make the terms?”

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He looked down for a moment as if deliberating ; and then, considering doubtless our case hopeless in any case, and that a show of some concession would appear better to the world, he said, "Your Highness shall have your wish,—your useless delay until seven to-morrow."

"Until seven to-morrow," I muttered to myself.

"Until seven to-morrow," acknowledged the Princess. "Ah, Baron, I fear it's an useless enough request. But I must make it,—for these poor gentlemen's sakes,—and for the poor fellows, their servants."

"I am glad to grant you this much, Your Highness, and I will direct General Barnato accordingly," Massimo said, making an obeisance.

The Princess kept her self-possession until he had disappeared under Balbi's conduct, and, then, she sank back with a little cry.

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“I could not have kept up a moment longer, Monsieur Gerald, and now you must do the rest.”

“Your Highness,” said I (I believe kneeling before her; for I hate a woman in tears), “I will try as best I may.”

She looked at me through her tears.

“How can you do anything, poor Gerald? And you are in this for me.”

“Trust to me,” I said softly. But I did not trust to myself. At the moment we heard the creaking draw declaring Massimo’s departure.

Chapter XII

How I Employ a Stratagem of Other more Famous Generals Before a Victorious Enemy

PRESENTLY Balbi returned saying he had the castle manned as well as he could with his few armed peasants. His face displayed his utter lack of expedients, while Reni had listened to my short talk with the Princess without venturing a word because he too had no opinion to advance.

“It is a dark night,” said I, not intending to be facetious, for Heaven knows we were then serious enough.

“Yes, low clouds without a breath of wind,” Balbi assented.

“So much the better.”

“What do you mean?” the Princess asked, looking at me with brightening eyes.

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“If we had a boat — ?”

“There is,” Balbi hastened to say, “as I told you.”

“We can lower it from the window on the side of the sea.”

“Yes?” said the Princess eagerly.

“If there were enough boats to carry us all.”

“I will inquire,” said Balbi, going out.

“We may be able to put sea?” said the Princess clapping her hands.

“If the sea will permit.”

“There are three, I find,” said Balbi returning and catching my last words.

“How far is it to Thara?”

“Fifteen miles following the coast.”

“The sea remaining calm we might reach,— say Thara, in three hours.”

The idea occurred to me even at that moment.

“I hate to confess myself beaten, gentlemen,” I continued, turning to the irresponsible Reni, and to Balbi; “particular-

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ly as only we can suffer in this affair we have undertaken. For the Princess it may mean simply temporary imprisonment, for I believe her position,— and the intervention of the Powers — will insist that her punishment shall go no further in the end than banishment from Dalmatia."

"I do not quite follow you," Reni interrupted.

"I do," said the Princess, serious over our danger, smiling over any chance; "and I would give the world to thwart them after all."

"How much of a force is left in Thara?" I began.

"Probably not over two hundred men?"

"And who is the commandant?"

"I believe a foreigner; Colonel Ferguson, an Irishman in the Dalmatian service."

"And the Prince is there?"

"Prince Frederick, and his family."

"It's this," said I, my own interest kindling in the plot; "we will drop the

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boats out of a window,— if they are in any serviceable condition. That window, the one in the tower, is on the side of the sea, and I do not believe we shall be observed in the darkness, unless the Baron Massimo has thought to patrol the coast; which I do not believe to be the case. For who would think of our descending from that window?"

"But the sea is dangerous," interrupted Reni for the first time.

"Have imagination, Signor Reni," I cried. "We will not put out to sea. We will row to Thara."

"To Thara?" He had not followed the bent of my questioning.

"We will appear before Colonel Ferguson who will be astonished enough, thinking that the troops sent out for our capture have us. We will say we are the van of another force.

"But should he refuse?— as is most likely."

"We will not let him refuse. We

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will persuade him by our effrontery. We will take the prince prisoner,— instead of him taking us. We, then, can dictate terms. And,— I have seen enough of Dalmatian fickleness,— to know there will be many desertions to our banner.”

“ But the Russian and English consuls ? ”

“ I will engage to play them against each other. They will not interfere.”

“ It’s dangerous,” Signor Reni began.

“ But our only plan,” I said. “ We can run, with to be sure the chances of being taken.”

“ It is the only way,” said the Princess.

“ Ah, Colonel Gerald, I owe you much.”

“ But first we must see that the boats will answer. If they fail we shall be forced to build a raft to carry us to shore and then— ” I did not notice the Princess’ words, so absorbed was I in the project, as the details presented themselves.

“ Try the boats,” said the Princess.

“ We will not fail,— before we know.”

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“And in the meantime,” Balbi interrupted, “a brave show must be kept of the ramparts being manned.”

“They do not believe we can get away unless we should fly.”

“And they may be right; but we can try,” said Signor Reni the incredulous.

“Ah, we will,” cried the Princess, clapping her hands like the girl she was; and yet a few moments before in the Massimo’s presence she had been the self-contained woman.

The boats we examined carefully. Two appeared to be sea-worthy. The other we experimented on, and thought it might stand. And then we examined the window, a broad opening intended for a gun carriage, I saw; now guarded by bars. The frame with the bars swung open, permitting me to look down into the sea, and out into blackness; for fortunately, as I have said, the night was black from low clouds, there being no moon. Ropes were found, and Balbi’s man, Jacopo, a

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brave Tuscan, volunteered to risk being lowered.

Cautiously, (for after all the enemy might have patrols,) we began it, making I thought an intolerable noise. The Princess stood at my elbow, an interested witness of the proceeding. The time seemed long while the Tuscans lowered this first boat with Jacopo and the oars. Six had been left with Balbi outside on the ramparts, and the six others, little, wiry fellows,—with the strength those little Tuscans sometimes have,—were at the task I superintended. Presently we heard a splash, and Jacopo's cry. I directed two of the men, who said they had followed the sea at one time, to go down the rope to assist him, and to get the boat already lowered out of the way of the one to follow. All this, you may believe, was done with constant fear of interruption. When Jacopo's cry came again, and we had pulled up the ropes, knowing all was well below, Reni called in

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three more from the ramparts, leaving there now only three with Balbi. Putting one in the next boat we lowered this, with equal success. Then I discovered that the third and worse boat had no oars. But finally I agreed with Reni, who here volunteered the opinion that the two boats would carry our party of seventeen, including the Princess and her woman. Six men were already below manning the boats, which were launched easily, as the foundations of the tower of Bergamo are laid well below the line of low tide.

And now came the question of lowering the women.

“I will wait for you, Colonel Gerald,” the Princess said. “I should not dare trust myself to anyone else.”

While this remark flattered me, particularly with the expression accompanying it out of those dark eyes, it did not make any easier the problem of getting the Princess and her woman to the boats.

Finally one of the men suggested tieing

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the woman to him, binding her to the rope by a slip noose. The woman shivered. But when the Princess assured her that she too was to follow in the same manner, she was reassured.

But first we were forced to call in two more men from outside, leaving but Balbi and one man to keep up the appearance. Balbi cautioned me not to forget the arms, which we let down before the man and the Princess' maid. The woman crossed herself again and again, but her mistress' eyes encouraged her.

And now it had come to the Princess' turn, it being necessary to keep a sufficient number of the men above to lower her safely.

“I will go down that rope with no one but you, Signor Gerald,” she declared positively again.

I had intended being the last from the tower, for now having taken the affair so entirely in hand, I counted it in some sense my own, and felt that I should act

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a captain's part in danger, and yet, I knew that she was more precious than all the rest; nor indeed was I willing to commit her to another's care.

As I have said, she was in a riding-habit, we having expected to leave Romaga on the false intelligence we had had, and it proved the best gown for the purpose. The slip noose about the rope was tied about her waist, and then — but I paused. I could not see her face in the darkness in which we had worked thus far. But I felt suddenly strangely happy, as I had her close to me, my arms about her; as we ventured into that mysterious abyss. Down we went. I could feel her heart against mine; and I knew suddenly why I was in Dalmatia; and that no other woman in all the world would mean anything to me.

Then Jacopo's voice called, and we were in the swaying boat. My heart beat until I could hear it I thought. For what if after all this risk, we should fail now?

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“You who have been so brave, be brave now,” she whispered low, reading me, her hand on my shoulder.

It seemed an age before the first of those left followed; then the others; and last of all Balbi,—the brave Balbi. And then our fears increasing the sound of the oar beats, we began to row along the coast to the south to Thara,—to the equally dangerous risk; while this other was not over.

Chapter XIII

The Loyalty of Colonel Ferguson, the Commandant of Thara

ALL my fears that I had forgot in the intensity of the action, now laid siege as we rowed along in that darkness ; and yet it was not long before we were sure, as we looked back at the blackness of Bergamo, that so far we had not been observed ; that at least we were now almost out of ear shot of the army of the government, and should they discover our departure before dawn, they would not imagine we had gone toward Thara. The search would be made out at sea, and I saw, all uncertain as this course appeared, that we were wisest in going to the capital. No safety lay on the land, where we shortly should be apprehended. All in-

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deed depended on the brilliancy of our daring in going directly to Thara. And, yet, I felt a certain pity for the Princess,—gently bred as she had been. She had been brought into this affair through her friends' ambition. Their intrigues had led to her arrest so far away that the rebellious attempt might fail; that the government might deprive the movement for the Romaga of its leader. And, now, we were making her more unpleasantness that we might save ourselves. Yet, should we succeed,—should we indeed place her on the throne,—how finely it all would end. But I felt a certain sadness,—the sadness of self-discovered selfishness; that when she really should be Princess of Dalmatia, established beyond peradventure, I no longer should be of her life. Yet I should not have been part of her life if Monseigneur Réux had not intrigued. I held it against him that this young girl was made a puppet to further his family ambition; and, yet, thanked him in my heart

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because his intrigue had brought her into my life. Here she was in the boat near me, covered with a rug, and giving us all heart by her good, brave spirit, until we all, down to the merest peasant of Balbi's would have died for her. How can some women, weak physically, yet be steel in an emergency ! For the spirit dominates them. And a woman's spirit, when it be strong and brave and pure, is a bit of the mystery of God's grace out of His infinitude.

The oars kept their steady dip. We talked and planned. The darkness hov-ered about, and the irregular, phantom-like coast, along which so much has hap-pened,—so many a venture has been taken by Venetian, Turk, by Crusader and Moslem. It was as if the far past had brought us under its spell ; as if the past again were asserting itself.

And then at last lights warned us, (Sig-nor Reni knew all that coast,) that we were approaching Thara, the quaint, half

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Eastern, still mediæval capital of Dalmatia. Without attracting much attention from the shipping, which became more numerous as we drew into the harbor, we succeeded in beaching the boats near the sea-wall. We must have been six hours on the water,— hours I have outlined here only vaguely, when I came to feel that I knew the Princess Beatrice better, and to be thankful for the strange sequence of events that had brought me into her life. My friends, I for one believe in Destiny ; and have I not a right for my belief from my experience.

We marshalled our forces very quietly. It was that quietest hour before dawn, as the lighting horizon of Dalmatian hills, and the towers of Thara declared. We had talked over every detail; Signor Reni, now that our momentary success had given him some persuasion, making some excellent suggestions. The Princess herself appeared tireless, although, poor girl, (I think of her as a little girl in those

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days although she was a woman, a great personage in all Europe) she must have been wearied indeed. Her woman now obeyed her mutely.

The citadel of Thara, as you know, or don't know,— for Dalmatia,— interesting as it is—is out of the beaten track of travellers,— the citadel dominates the town. The Palace of the Prince, where formerly the Venetian Intendants lived, is part of the same building.

Strange as it may seem, no particular watch seemed to be kept. The city gates, Thara being a walled town, were open, and we reached the very citadel gate before arousing a sleepy sentinel, who presented arms. It was evident the government considered it had the incipient rebellion for the Romaga interest suppressed.

This sentinel we seized before he fully understood, and had him gagged, the Princess crying out for us to be careful not to hurt him. At the gate I clanged the

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knocker, Balbi bidding the man who projected an head through the portcullis to summon Colonel Ferguson. He said that was impossible at that hour ; should he, he certainly would get the guard-house.

“From Baron Massimo,” I said, on an inspiration.

The name had its effect, for presently, without giving us further question, the fellow disappeared. We expected the Lieutenant of the Guard, but not the opening of the gate which in the event happened. In the court revealed,—it was fast becoming dawn,—was a young Dalmatian Lieutenant, with a single soldier bearing a lantern.

“What do you want ?” he demanded.

“It’s I, Antonio Spezzio,” said the Princess, stepping forward.

He started as if she had been a ghost as he well might have thought, since all Thara expected that the Princess now was a prisoner.

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“It’s this, Lieutenant Spezzio, the government army has gone over to the Romaga.”

“Your Highness?” stammered the Lieutenant at this astonishing statement.

“Inform Colonel Ferguson, Lieutenant Spezzio,” the Princess here interrupted.

Our very assurance — the Princess’s beauty too, perhaps — won this part of the campaign; for the boy, stammering and apologetic, admitted us. I will hasten to add that at that time Dalmatian military discipline might have excited the derision of a Servian. But as it happened, Lieutenant Spezzio was distantly related to the Romaga which partly may have explained his action.

Yet we waited fearful of Colonel Ferguson who appeared half dressed, one of the most startled Irishmen I have had the pleasure of meeting. For, as I said at the beginning of this narrative, I myself am half Irish, and understand the race. He entered, not knowing whether, or no

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to put us under arrest, I believe. And here, too, pure effrontery won, as it does so often in this world.

“Your Highness!” began this red-faced modern soldier of fortune, “I don’t understand.”

“It means, Colonel,” said the Princess simply, “that the house of Heidelberg in Dalmatia is overthrown.”

“And I — ?”

“You serve me, Colonel,” said our lady as spiritedly as possible, and showing not in the least the fatigue of that hard night’s adventure.

And how could he believe that it was much less than he was told? that we only were pretending? How could we have dared it? It was beyond belief. And, yet, when Colonel Ferguson once had been won over, he was ours. He could not go back, because plainly he had been disloyal to Frederick of Heidelberg’s government. That is the point we counted on in the affair. The Princess I knew

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did not like the falsity of her position,—not in the least. But she had her friends' lives at stake, and she only put Colonel Ferguson into the position of her other friends. That was the view, she afterwards told me, that she took of the question. And as I say, how was Colonel Ferguson to know that we were acting simply on assurance. He might have said that he would wait until he had better proof, until the Dalmatian Parliament had confirmed Beatrice, until after the coronation. But Colonel Ferguson had his own future to think of. As a matter of fact he had been discharged from the army of Her Gracious Majesty, the Empress of India. If he lost this place in Dalmatia for what could he hope? Colonel Ferguson was a poor man. And, as I say, the evidence was in our favor; never in the world was there better circumstantial evidence, I am sure now.

Down on his knees went Colonel Ferguson.

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“Your Highness,” he stammered, “my loyalty to the government is unimpeachable.”

“And Her Highness is the government now.”

“Her Highness is the government,” repeated Colonel Ferguson like a parrot.

“Get up Colonel,” said the Princess, smiling graciously he thought. “You are a brave man, I know.”

“For Your Highness’ interest.”

“And now,” said the Princess, “you can find me quarters in the Palace.”

“Your Gracious Highness’s palace,” assented the Colonel. He gave an order, and there was bustling in the corridor.

“And the next thing, Colonel,” said the Marquis Balbi here, “is to put Prince Frederick under arrest.”

When that should be done Colonel Ferguson’s committal to our side would be complete.

“It evidently follows,” said the dazed Colonel.

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The Princess stood in the door where an amazed maid-of-honor of the Princess Honoria awaited her.

“Colonel,” said our mistress hesitating, “the Marquis Balbi and Mr. Gerald represent me. You will take your orders from them.”

And bowing to us she went out with the lady into the palace, which as you know, is part of the citadel of Thara.

“You will accompany us to arrest Prince Frederick,” Balbi began to our Irish soldier of Fortune.

If the Colonel had said this was the natural sequel of our proceeding, I fancied he hesitated. But fear of seeming lack of devotion to the new regime persuaded him; and he led the way,—ordering the astonished guard at the Prince’s bedroom door to stand aside. We knocked; again, several times, when a petulant voice demanded the reason for the interruption.

Frederick of Heidelberg never is an imposing man, although a prince; and

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now he looked sufficiently startled as well he might. Colonel Ferguson stood in the shadow. A lamp was burning on a table revealing the Prince half out of bed.

“It means Your Majesty, that a Revolution has placed the Princess Beatrice of Romaga on the Throne of Dalmatia.”

Never had a reigning prince so great a shock,—so unexpected an announcement that he no longer reigned. He turned an *Et Tu Brute* on Colonel Ferguson. “And you Colonel?” The Colonel hung his head. But he now was ours, body and soul, as we knew.

Outside, Balbi sent for two of his own men who, as an extra precaution, he added to the single guard at the Prince’s door,—a guard that now held his deposed Prince a prisoner. But none of the Dalmatians had any particular affection for the House of Heidelberg.

When we had left Venice we had with us three flags with the device of Romaga, and it was the black hound against the

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red background flying from the citadel, that startled Thara that morning; that amazed the British Minister, Lord Twickenham, and left Prince Stefanoff, the Russian, near speechless. For we had Thara by daring assurance. The Prince was our prisoner. The palace,—the garrison, and Colonel Ferguson were ours. We counted on winning many by this apparent success; on arousing disaffection in the army on its return from Bergamo. No Russian, nor English, war vessel was in the harbor; but I thought it expedient to look up Lord Twickenham in the morning. He was to be won over. For although we had won so far in our attempt,—although we had turned defeat into momentary victory,—we could not be sure that it would be more than momentary.

Chapter XIV

The Fickle Chance of Battle.

OUT of sheer exhaustion I fell asleep shortly after, but I had left word I should be waked in an hour, knowing how much depended on the morrow. I found Balbi, Reni, and Colonel Ferguson in close conference. They had told Ferguson on my advice the truth (for I thought we better could keep his interest by being entirely frank, and he certainly was committed to us). If he were rather crest-fallen at first, he felt he could not retreat, and I am sure the Princess' personality appealed to him. He gave us some good advice about holding our position. That day would show whether we could, we all felt.

I began, although I still was fagged, by

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calling on the British minister, as I have said to play him against the Russian. Lord Twickenham knew the apparent situation by this time, for rumor and the new flag on the citadel had carried the news. He was dumbfounded he confessed, but acknowledged that the change might not be against British interest in Dalmatia, particularly as Frederick was a cat's paw for Russian diplomacy. He told me only the other day at a garden party how he felt that eventful morning.

I had made the call, thinking to propitiate Lord Twickenham,—at least to prejudice him in our favor, although I hoped that we should have settled our affair before a man-of-war of any of the Powers should appear. The Russian minister I did not go near. I remembered the strong hand Russia had played in the matter of the Princess' arrest in California and in my abduction; and I did not consider Prince Stefanoff would be glad to see me. My visit on the Earl of Twicken-

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ham was positively the “well enough” to let alone.

Returning to the palace I met the Princess who looked wonderfully pretty, and fresh,—after her experiences. She gave me her hand without a word.

“ You are my reliance,” she said softly. I muttered something, feeling you may believe more than I said.

By noon we had not received so much encouragement as we had expected. Some of the former cabinet came apologetically, and uncertainly. The Mayor of Thara offered to give us his countenance. But Prince Stefanoff had not appeared either to threaten openly or to dissimulate ; nor did Lord Twickenham return my visit. While our last move had resulted well, the whole original plan of the revolt appeared singularly badly planned. I do not believe the mind of man ever planned so momentous an undertaking so ill.

About two o’clock a spy brought word that the army of General Barnato and

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Baron Massimo was returning. By three we received definite demand to surrender. On our refusal preparations were made for assault. And then, Colonel Ferguson,—God forgive us for entangling him to his destruction!—showed his mettle.

“I’ll fight to the end, Mr. Gerald,” he declared. “I am committed to the Princess who is a dear Princess, sir, and I like the pluck of you all.”

So the demand to surrender did not meet with a favorable answer. We told them we had the Prince as hostage. They did not appear to care for that threat,—Frederick of Heidelberg having been from the first but a figurehead in Dalmatia. He had been an half-pay lieutenant of the Kaiser’s when chosen to fill the Dalmatian throne.

But I had underrated General Barnato whom I did not know at this time. Massimo I did know as you do by this time. Prince Stefanoff urged the assault I believe since. These persons had too

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much to lose not to make a most desperate fight.

It was altogether a very brave assault, yet we should have held our own if our men, save the officers and Balbi's peasants had not thrown down their arms. The Princess was in her room in the palace watching the scene. When I saw nothing could be done, I rushed toward the palace leaving Balbi, Ferguson, and Reni fighting like madmen the first of those over the walls in the assault. For Reni, whom I lately had underrated showed unquestionable spirit again. Balbi you know as a brave man; and Ferguson was killed at the citadel gate—an Irish adventurer of the kind that in the old days was so numerous on the continent, a man of spirit, and, for all his dismissal from the British army, a gentleman. The imprisoned Prince must have heard the melee with delight. To me came fear for the Princess, and it was to protect her that I rushed into the palace, to be near her in her need.

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Ah, what might we not have done if Colonel Ferguson's two hundred men had not been cowards !

In some way I became involved in a maze of corridors. In one I ran on a man with drawn sword. As he emerged into the light I saw Massimo, his blade dripping,—his face demoniac.

All my resentment at the man's machinations against me, and those I had come to like, left me at the moment more insane than sane. I had out my sword, and we met full tilt in that narrow passage. The narrownesss of the passage indeed compensated, I think now, for my lack of skill in the fence. In another place he would have had the certain advantage. I lunged at him mad with rage, and disappointment at this utter failure. He saw the danger in my eye. Possibly he feared me, for expert as he was, he forgot his guard, when I ran him through. He tottered, suddenly recovered himself, giving me a return thrust ; and I too, lost con-

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sciousness, but not before he fell over; not before I knew my stroke had ridden me, Dalmatia, and the world of this plotter, who yet, I will concede, was a brave man. But he was as treacherous as a man could be; he would have sold Prince Frederick to us had he thought we had his price.

Well, I lost consciousness I say, and then I had a sort of semi-consciousness and knew I was being carried. And then—I knew nothing. But after a period of blankness, I opened my eyes to see I was on a couch in a room, and I heard a man, —and a woman's, the Princess Beatrice's, voice.

“Your Highness, we cannot find the Englishman. We want him,” said the man.

“This is my apartment, Signor,” came the Princess' reply, coldly.

“I beg your pardon, Your Highness.”

He turned as if to go, I fancied.

“Your Highness knows that you are a

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prisoner,— that there is a guard before the door of your apartment."

" You need not press the knowledge on me, Signor," I heard her low answer ; and then the door closed, and a moment after I saw her face over me weeping,— weeping for those who had died that day, — for Ferguson, for Balbi ; and then I thought — Oh, I was glad that she was there, and I was enraged, I could not comfort her ; for I was faint again, and the room was dark.

Chapter XV

How Certain Travelers Take the Greek Steamer at Thara.

A GAIN her voice reached me out of the fog of returning sense.

“ And how is he, Father ? ”

“ It ’s only the loss of blood, my daughter. The wound is trifling,” said the other.

My eyes opened on a thin ascetic, cowled face, a monk ; a woman, a nun, was bandaging my side, where was a sudden acute pain ; but the faintness had gone. The nun looked into my eyes, a dark spiritual, pitying face.

“ You are better, Signor.”

And then the Princess Beatrice was by my side, her face pale, concerned, and, yet, now glad.

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“ You will live, Gerald,” she said softly.

“ It was foolish of me,” I said, my voice gaining strength.

“ Brave, Gerald,” said she,—“ for me.”

“ I am glad,” said I sentimentally ; “ if I may have been of any service.” Oh, how poor my service had been ; how fool-hardy ; how had I lost, yet against odds.

“ I know that,” said she. “ But you must not talk. I am a prisoner, Gerald, — in my apartment. My woman found you in the corridor. We dragged you in here.”

“ Ah, it was good of you. I am so sorry, Your Highness — ”

“ You could not have done better. But listen. Don’t talk. They came for you, but they did not dare look into this inner room.” And then I remembered the conversation I had heard, and all was clear,— the whole circumstance, the duel with Massimo ; nor was I sorry that I had killed him. The old sophisticated sav-

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agery was in my heart; the old feeling that dominated mediæval Italy, which these events seemed to have reproduced. But I was glad over this, I think now, because this man had been her enemy, had made life hard for her.

“I have friends in Thara,” the Princess continued; “I could trust,—the church.”

“You always have that, my daughter,—whether the world prospers, or fails,” said the monk in a low voice that had not lost an expression of worldly desire.

“I know Father Ambrose. And Father Ambrose and Sister Matilda alone know of your presence here, Gerald.”

I liked clearly to hear my name from her with no title at all, the simple name.

“And Father Ambrose is a surgeon, and good friend of my House,” she continued.

“After God, my daughter,” said the Priest. “The Signor Gerald’s wound is only trifling,—Jesu be thanked.”

“I thank Him, Father,” said the Prin-

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cess softly. "And now Gerald we will leave you, for we do not dare remain here too long."

"You will get your strength directly," said the priest. "We will try to make all well," he added kindly. The nun threw a rug over me. The Princess looked back, pausing at the door; and then I heard them talking in low tones, and, finally, the outer door shutting.

The priest had been right. It only was loss of blood adding to the exhaustion from the mental strain I had been under. In a few hours I was sitting up, walking about the little room, talking with Beatrice Romaga, blaming myself, and she pardoning. Those two days were the sweetest I believe of my life, when she was prisoner in the citadel at Thara, and I was hidden; for even the worst defeat is not so gruesome as our fears have drawn it. We were out of the world; did not know what was happening, how intrigue was going. But it was the priest who advised

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attempting escape. A Greek steamer plying between the Piræus and Venice, and touching at the coast ports, puts in at Thara weekly. It was expected at ten one evening, and the priest came with the suggestion that we should attempt to pass the guards and to book passage for Venice. He offered to lend me his frock. Sister Matilda appeared at the palace veiled. The Princess was about the nun's height and figure. In the night we could pass out, Father Ambrose thought.

“If you are caught, you will be in no worse plight,” he said, as we sat in that inner room. “Signor Gerald will be executed—”

“Father,” said the Princess paling; “am I to bring misery on all who serve me?”

“You, my daughter, will be in a better position in Italy. Here you may expect a long imprisonment,—at the best,—while the governments of Europe are considering the situation. They will not

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dare harm you. But I believe you will be better,—under the Italian flag."

"And you, Father?" she said,—"you and Sister Matilda?—my friends?"

"They can't hurt us, my daughter. We believe that the church in Dalmatia would be defended better by the Romaga. We are doing but duty."

"Yet you have been admitted here at my request. Prince Frederick has granted me a confessor, and Sister Matilda, my friend. How can we betray,—this—this trust?"

"It's for Signor Gerald's life, my daughter," said the priest. "If I be priest, I am man. I cannot see a brave man die, when out of Dalmatia he has committed no crime,—when the government changing, as it may any day, the culprit becomes the hero."

"Father," said the Princess softly, "I will accept your offer; but—it's not—for myself."

The priest bent his head, raising her

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hand to his lips. "It only can be a matter of some days before the Signor Gerald's presence here is discovered,—should he remain."

I who had listened here broke in; and I am glad now to say that I did not wish them to take these risks for me. Yet life,—when you see it slipping from your control,—becomes sweetest, dearest; the open beckons; the sky is bluest; the birds' songs most melodious; and life twitched at my heart; and she,—my mistress,—joined my own wish.

"Have not the Marquis Balbi, and Colonel Ferguson lost their lives—for me. Is not Signor Reni waiting the Court's decision? I cannot spare you, Gerald." And her voice held a sob, and she was dear to me,—and the thought of that flight across the Adriatic in her company,—became dearer still. Ah, I was weak perhaps; but life is so dear when you are losing it.

And so,—why should I explain more,

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— the night when the Greek steamer sails from Thara to Venice, the monk and the nun came as now was customary to the Princess Beatrice's apartment in the palace at Thara. The Princess wept over them. I pressed Father Ambrose's hand, thanking him for the greatest favor a man can bestow on man. A priest should be but an ordinary man improved (I have my doubts of this being the case with the Bishop of Westchester).

A few moments after the guard at the Princess' door saw the monk and nun pass out. No one suspected I had been hidden in the palace. The authorities only knew that I had disappeared the day of the assault on the citadel,— when our garrison fearful of the large numbers of their assailers, had laid down their arms, but when Colonel Ferguson and the Marquis Balbi had fought to the death. The officers had fought; but not the people. For in all this Dalmatian revolt the people had been curiously indifferent; and in that

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was the failure. The truth is that socialism has its seeds well sprouted among the Dalmatians, and the old loyalty has died, — and ignorance, played on by deprivation only, is waiting its chance to spring, like a tiger, to the throat of all present law. Were the Dalmatians not so readily purchasable, they might make a republic in Dalmatia.

The guard at the door did not remark the veiled nun, nor the monk, although he had added a full inch to his stature. Without a word monk and nun passed through the corridors into the court of the citadel. Courtiers passed; Prince Oscar, the heir apparent, with some gay blades,—uproarious boon companions. The nun's hand went timidly to her companion's arm. Past the outer guards they went,—into the street of Thara, which extends from the Piazza San Simeone to the Porta Marina. The monk and nun followed this thoroughfare to the pier, where the Greek steamer was putting out for Venice. They passed

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onto the steamer unremarked,—a monk and nun, a common enough sight.

Yes, the Armenian purser said, two rooms were reserved “for Father Ambrose and Sister Matilda, Thara, booked for Venice.” The monk and nun went below, still unnoticed. At the door of the nun’s room they pressed each other’s hands.

“The risk, Gerald,—your risk,” said the nun softly.

“Have we not been in danger together before ?” said the monk.

The nun bowed her head, and passed in. The monk as if daring recognition went on deck among the motley crowd that travel by these steamers,—Greeks, Albanians, Turks, Arabs, Italians, an occasional Frenchman, or Englishman, the mixture of races.

Above in the darkness lay the towers, and roofs, the huddled houses of Thara. On the citadel where had flown for a day the black hound of Romaga was again the

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boar and fox of the German prince who held the Dalmatian throne. The monk did not see all these features of the place, but he knew they were there behind the darkness. And then the welcome sounds came, the wheezing engine, the scraping of the gang planks as they were withdrawn from the stones of the pier ; and the Greek steamer pushed out into the sea, and Thara was lost in gloom.

And then the nun came above.

“ So far, so well,” she whispered.

And the monk said, “ all is well where you are, my Princess.”

Yet although her hand was in his he was sorry. He knew he was weak ; that she was born to a great position ; that caste separated them. You may call out on caste ; may deride it ; but it is back of our civilization,— and always will be, as it always has been, behind every civilization. It can’t be escaped, because it is founded on human nature which makes human institutions to fit itself,—mental garments.

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There are certain episodes in one's life you can not tell of, because they are personal,—sacred, like one's religion. And such an episode was that voyage across the Adriatic. We talked for hours, feeling that we knew not when we should be able to talk again alone by ourselves. We said good-night with hand pressure. It was a warm night, such as November sometimes will bring in the Adriatic, and I remained on deck,—dreaming, regretting,—among the huddled crowd of passengers from the isles of Greece, the modern, keenly commercial denizens of those isles. And at last I slept, to wake at dawn to see Venice rising out of the West against dim mountains,—the glorified Venice which Turner may have seen,—Venice with color run mad. And as I looked at the scene I had strength to be unselfish for her. If we should be happy for a time,—she would lose caste. An American they say is a social equal of anybody, which astonishing statement I

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think is founded on extraordinary conceit. Some of us may be ; but more are not. I was wise enough not to flatter myself before the most adorable of women. I am glad, as I look back on it, that at least that morning I was strong enough to have the better of selfishness.

Yet, for one moment there was weakness when she appeared above, anxiety gone,— the eyes laughing again like a girl's. How could I resist her? And I thought this our last meeting. We were past the Lido. The Piazza was before us. The Princess was to go at once to some adherents of her house in Venice, and then to Rome. We were not to be seen together. To avoid arrest which might follow me I was going to America at once. Nor did I know that even there I might not be extradited for my offenses in Dalmatia. I did not know the nature of our treaty with that country.

Yes, for us was parting. We both knew it. I took her hand, and there as

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the Greek steamer came to its landing in sight of the Doges' palace, our lips were together for one brief moment; and then I was walking hurriedly over the plank,—my Bridge of Sighs,—not daring to look back. If one may be better for being strong one may be sadder.

Did I say once I thought Venice, the crumbling Venice, beautiful? That morning it was detestable. Despite the danger I ran of arrest, a bravado seized me. I went boldly about; bought some clothes,—atrociously cut in the French manner; tried to get some pleasure out of a gallery, out of lunch on the Piazza; and then openly,—not denying I was Robert Gerald, I took train for Paris. As bad luck would have, some acquaintances were on that train. How they bored me! How commonplace,—how drearily commonplace they appeared! But they never had been in Dalmatia. All my heart,—all my hope,—I had left in the past,—voluntarily left, because this was only the way of duty.

Chapter XVI

How, in some Respects, Monseigneur Réux Resembles the Famous Cardinal Richelieu.

THE Dalmatian affair by this time was the talk of the hour ; and I saw with amusement the versions the papers gave. The presence of a mysterious Englishman, or American, was mentioned,—when I laughed in my sleeve. No one suspected me as this person ; no one save some of the Dalmatian conspirators and Monseigneur Réux knew. On the boulevards the feuilletons told the story. The habitus discussed it over their coffee-and-cognac.

As for me, in Paris I was bound to find my old world, my friends, endless letters, denunciations and wonder at my faculty,

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— they termed it faculty,— of disappearance. How alike was the world! how changeless! But I had been out of it. I wondered about the Princess. I had not heard of her, or from her, since I had left her in Venice,— since I had turned my back, and left her, and now,— shall I be frank? — I was regretful. I went to call on Monseigneur Réux. Monseigneur Réux was in Rome.

But one day I had a telegram from Rome. “ You must come here at once,” and this was signed in Monseigneur’s name. What could have happened? Why did Monseigneur Réux wish to see me; an hundred answers suggested themselves? I booked that afternoon on the Indian mail to Brindisi. The journey was abominably long. Of a Thursday morning I was at Monseigneur’s Réux’s which is near the Villa Borghese. Monseigneur would see the Signor.

Monseigneur looked no older than the other day; his face had no more lines.

Réux Resembles Richelieu

Possibly I expected him to show his anxiety over our attempt; but he did not. Yet he was expressive. He congratulated me on bravery; said a lot of things I will not record here; did not blame my rashness which failed. At first I did not ask for the Princess Beatrice; at first I only wondered. When I did, Monseigneur's face was grave.

“On her account I sent for you.”

“Why?” I asked. “Why?”

“It's arranged,—the Dalmatian matter. It has been agreed to arrange a marriage between the Princess Beatrice, and the heir apparent, Prince Oscar of Dalmatia. That satisfies us Romaga.”

“Yes,” said I.

“But—”

“Is there one?”

“Yes, the Princess will not have it—is obstinate. Finally she said she would if you would ask her. It is a very peculiar condition,” said Monseigneur Réux looking over narrowly,—“very.”

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I believe I blushed; I wondered why. Blushing is not a man's prerogative.

"I don't wonder why," said Monseigneur Réux. "But,—that is impossible."

But what the Princess would say, or would n't say, was the matter with me; was the possible or the impossible. I was strong no longer. I forgot myself. I am no hero; have never pretended to be one. I indeed advised her to accept the arrangement. But my eyes, my voice contradicted me. I could not bear to think of this adorable lady as belonging to that roisterer, Oscar of Dalmatia.

Monseigneur Réux stormed, and, then, was reconciled. All Europe gossiped. She descended from her caste to mine. I was weak,—I the son of an Irish adventurer in America to dare to think of the daughter of an hundred generations. But she declares she never has been sorry to have given up Dalmatia, to have followed what she declares was her heart's wish.

Réux Resembles Richelieu

And I have tried to be worthy,— here in the quiet villa by the Mediterranean which is named after the great Italian, Goldoni, who wrote of the comedy of life so well,— the life that gives us defeat in victory, and again victory in defeat.

I have written this account because Monseigneur Réux has told I should explain what was once a matter more or less public. I have tried to tell how I became involved with the affairs of the Romaga; and how went that unfortunate, that foolish revolt. The case against me was not pressed; the Princess ceased to be a dangerous element in Dalmatian politics because she married morganatically me, her inferior. The political enemies of the Romaga felt themselves really in my debt. Signor Reni, his servants, and I all were pardoned.

But I may have wronged her, this last Romaga. Sometimes I am angry at my weakness; sometimes even in my happy-

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ness I long for the activity of the days when we fought and intrigued, when Colonel Ferguson, the Irish adventurer, died so bravely because he had committed himself to us in the citadel of Thara. And then, when I am sorry, I see Beatrice's eyes, the face framed by the yellow hair. There is a face very like hers, a Titian, in the gallery of the Villa Borghese. They say Titian painted a lady of the Romaga, my lady's ancestress. I believe in heredity.

Monseigneur Réux is a very great man, I am told. Cardinal Réux he is now. If he had ambition for his family, if he plotted, men still are human even in the church—a human institution for spiritual need.

But I have ended the story which shows that we are all puppets of destiny, or of God. The better, the more devout, humble,—truer statement, is, “So God Wills.” He has willed us, and our weaknesses. He has made life influence us, and we,

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life. The least of us,—the weakest, the lowest, makes some impression on life, on the universe,—like a little pebble a ripple, perhaps of imperceptible, inconsiderable smallness, but still a ripple in the great,—the infinite-sea.

PRINTED BY R. R. DONNELLEY
AND SONS COMPANY AT THE
LAKESIDE PRESS, CHICAGO, ILL
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